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"THE MAN WAS A VILLAIN, MISS, TO DESERT YOU AND YOUR BABY, PRETTY AND INNOCENT AS YOU ARE."
"NO, NO, DO NOT CENSURE HIM, FOR I ALONE AM TO BLAME," SHE CRIED.

MOTHERLESS;

Or, THE FARMER'S SWEETHEART.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

THE HAUNTED MILL.

A YOUNG man was trudging along a coun-

try road that ran through one of the most beautiful and fertile valleys of New York State.

From his appearance, his *neglige* but stylish dress, it was evident that he walked from choice, rather than necessity.

Suddenly he reached a bend in the road, where a weed-grown drive branched off down the valley, and, after running along the banks of the stream for nearly half a mile,

halted at a large, rambling old structure, upon which rested a look of neglect and desolation.

"Ah! there is the old Haunted Mill, and it is indeed worthy of my brush," said the wayfarer, and he moved on down the weed-grown road, until he stood near the deserted structure.

In the long ago it had been a grand building, and the pride of the country, and the farmers for many miles around came there to have their grists ground, and chat over the news and gossip, beneath the shadows of the wide-spreading trees, while the water-wheel turned on its untiring course, and the sound within told of a busy time for the miller and his men.

Then Old Miller Lucas was in the heyday of prosperity, for his farm was well tilled, his mill brought him in a good revenue, and he had only his wife and son to care for.

But, suddenly, a shadow had fallen upon the miller and his wife, and it grew deeper and deeper as the years rolled on, for their son and heir, the handsome, dashing Donald, had gone from the right way into the wrong, and, step by step, went downward, until at last, in a fit of rage, when driven mad by the cup of intoxication, he had taken a fellow-being's life.

Donald Lucas had fled after his red deed; but the hounds of the law were set upon his track, and ere long he was brought back in irons.

Though he had bitterly erred, his old parents had not deserted him, for the old farmer had gone to the best lawyer in the town, some miles away, and bade him save his boy.

"Don has been wild, squire, and cost me lots of money; but the old mill and farm are worth considerable, and I have mortgaged them, so don't spare money," he had said.

It may be that those who sat on the jury were fathers, and knew how to sympathize with the gray-haired man who so eagerly scanned their faces during all the trial, that made them return a verdict of:

"Not guilty!"

But such a verdict they did return, and Donald Lucas returned to the mill a free man, free from the iron bars of the jail, and the shadow of the gallows, but with the iron of remorse eating deep into his soul.

Soon after he had left home, and none knew whither he went, or cared, excepting his aged parents and a broken-hearted woman, it was said, he had left behind.

And, from the day of his departure, his mother's health began to fail, and, when a few months had passed away, she was laid in the village church-yard.

Stern, silent, and persevering, the miller

worked on, each year whitening his hair and bending his form, and disease evidently gnawing away at his vitals; but, uncomplaining, sorrowing, he struggled for one end, and at last it was accomplished.

That end was to clear the old place of its mortgage, and, that done, the goal of his life had been reached, and he laid him down to die, and his last words were:

"Poor Don sinned bitterly, but he cannot, go where he may, get rid of his conscience, so his punishment has been great, and what I leave may soothe his after years. Put it down, squire, for my boy, for I leave all to him."

Miller Lucas was laid by the side of his wife; the old mill, one-half of which had been their comfortable home, was closed up, and the farm laborers left the field for the weeds to creep in.

Year by year passed away, and desolation and decay claimed the old mill as their own, and the superstitious country people began to shun the spot, and tell strange stories regarding it, until at last, it was called "haunted," and few cared to go nearer to it than the bridge on the highway, and which spanned the swiftly-running stream that had turned the huge water-wheel in the days of lang syne.

Such was the story of the old mill and its surrounding farm, whose heir still remained away, wandering, none knew whither, or cared.

With no dread of the lone spot, the young man strode nearer and nearer, until he suddenly paused, and said, in a low, musing tone:

"The very subject for a fine painting, and it shall be my masterpiece. Yes, old ruin, I'll put you so faithfully upon canvas, that every crook and cranny will speak of desertion, desolation, and spooks, and the very look will tell the story of the past.

"Now to work," and opening his portfolio he selected the best view of the old structure, and setting his easel, as the shadows began to grow long, and give a weird, solemn aspect to the surroundings, his master hand began upon the work he had set himself to do.

CHAPTER II.

THE GHOST OF THE HAUNTED MILL.

So wrapt up was the young artist in his work that he failed to notice the double shadows of night and a storm gathering, until a sudden flash of flame almost blinded him and caused him to start to his feet with the crashing peal of thunder that followed.

He had nearly finished sketching the outline of the old mill, and the landscape he intended bringing into his painting, and each

stroke of his pencil had but added to the charm of his work, and he was building up dreams for the future of renewed fame added to his name; won upon the merits of the scene then before him, which his genius was putting on canvas.

Seeing that a fearful storm was about to break upon him, he seized hastily his easel and portfolio, and darted for the old mill.

He approached by the residence side, sprung upon the piazza, and a vigorous kick sent in the door, and he felt that he was safe from a drenching.

Turning, he stood in the doorway and gazed out upon the approaching storm rushing across the heavens from the eastward.

As he stood there a ray of light from the setting sun, which was not yet wholly obscured by clouds, fell upon his face, and revealed its almost womanly beauty of features.

It was the face of a man of twenty-six, perhaps, with the stamp of genius upon it, and eyes that were large, languid, and seemed ever looking back into the past, rather than toward the present and the future.

He was well dressed in a corduroy suit, slouch hat, top boots, and had the air of one who had not only been born in the lap of luxury, but lived a rather gay life.

Though his face was as handsome as a woman's, it yet wore an expression of resolution that destroyed its effeminacy, and the mouth was a trifle cynical and reckless, sometimes even looking stern, as thoughts flashed through his brain.

"Well, this looks like an all-night rain, and it is five miles to the tavern. Wish I had taken the advice of old Boniface and ridden over; but it matters not, for if the rain continues, I can make myself comfortable here," and he glanced about the long-deserted room.

It was half hall, half room that he had entered, with a large fire-place in one end, and doors leading either side of the chimney place to other parts of the house.

The furniture had never been removed, and all had been left just as it was when Miller Lucas died, and so remained, except for the ravages left by time, awaiting the return of the wandering heir.

Lost in the grandeur of the bursting storm the young artist stood spellbound, his eyes drinking in the scene with all the love of the grand and the beautiful that was in his nature, and wholly forgetting himself, and that he was daring that in the gathering darkness of night which no one in that neighborhood would dare in the glare of day—that is, he was standing within the portals of the spook-haunted mill.

As the darkness grew denser, the lightning

flashed more vividly, and the winds made the trees bend and sigh mournfully, while the stream, grown to a torrent by the deluge of rain that was falling, tore along with a savage roar, and struck the old water-wheel with a force that made the building tremble beneath the shock.

At last the muttering thunder rolled onward, the vivid lightning only glared from afar, and the fury of the storm had passed on, leaving only the sighing wind, moaning torrent and steady patter of the falling rain.

"Well, here I am, and for the night too.

"One match only, and if it fails me dismal darkness, in which to conjure up the ghost of the old place," the unintimidated young man muttered to himself, and he drew from his match-box the last match, and felt his way over to the fire-place.

The match did not fail him, a paper he had with him gave ready light, and a few sticks were gathered from the corner of the hearth and ignited.

Then an old chair was smashed to atoms and thrown on to make a cheerful blaze, and the bold intruder of the spook roost, set out to search for other wood to burn.

A torch aided him in his search, and he soon returned with an armful of large sticks taken from a shed out across the hall and dining-room, and his quick eyes had discovered a candle in a brass stick.

In the adjoining room, the dining-room, evidently, he found a sofa, and this he wheeled into the chamber in which he had taken up his lodgings, and placing it before the ruddy fire threw himself upon it with a sigh of perfect contentment.

The fire gave a good light, so he put out the candle, and set to thinking; but, as though his thoughts were not of a pleasant nature, he banished them, and resigned himself to sleep with the air of one who held no fear of aught on earth.

How long he slept he did not know, but he was awakened with a start, as though he had heard a voice calling him.

The rain still pattered upon the roof, the winds still howled dismally, and the moaning of the rushing torrent met his ears.

"Bah! the old place gave me an attack of the nightmare, that was all," he said, and again lulled by the patter, patter of the rain he sunk to sleep.

And again he awoke with a start, and nervy as he was, a cry broke from his lips.

The fire had burned low; but there was light enough for him to see distinctly a form clad in white, bending over him.

It was a woman, and her long hair fell almost into his face; but, at his sudden start and cry she had glided away like a shadow

and disappeared through the door leading in to the adjoining room.

Instantly he sprung toward her, and followed her, but the darkness of the other room was such that he saw nothing, and yet the noise of a light retreating footstep came distinctly to his ears.

"I am awake, that is certain, and I distinctly saw a woman bending over me, her eyes gazing upon my face. By Jove! the place is haunted. But I'll go on the hunt for the ghost," and so saying he returned for the candle, lighted it, threw more wood on the fire, and started on his voyage of discovery.

The old mill, built as it was upon the bank of a stream, was four stories upon one side, and two on the other, and held beneath its capacious roof, nearly a score of rooms.

One after the other of these the daring artist invaded, going from room to room, and floor to floor, and observing upon everything the unsparing finger touches of Time.

But, after a thorough search of the building the young painter returned to his sofa before the ruddy fire and again threw himself down to rest, but not to sleep, though he feigned it.

Thus an hour passed, and then he thought he heard a step in the other room. And he was not mistaken, for slowly the door opened, and he beheld a white form and face in the opening. Wider it opened, and the person glided into the room.

It was a woman, and her long, black hair hung below her waist, and added a ghastly pallor to her face which even the firelight would not give a glow to.

He was in hopes she would come nearer; but, after a long, steady gaze at him, she seemed to glide backward, and the door closed behind her.

"Stay! I beseech you! be you ghost or human," he cried, springing to his feet, and he darted to the door.

To his surprise, *it was locked.*

Awed by what he had seen, for he knew he was awake, he returned to his sofa, and lay there meditating upon the spectral being until the gray of dawn crept in at the windows.

Then, with the light of day, after dashing in with a kick, the locked door, he took another survey of the mill and house, and again failed to find the ghost that haunted it.

Remembering a farm-house a mile away, he went there, and was hospitably invited to breakfast, which he ate with a relish, though the story he had to tell completely took away the appetite of the good farmer and his wife, who were firm believers in the supernatural.

"Don't tempt Providence, sir, and go there again," was urged upon him.

"Oh, yes, for I have left my working tools there, and must return and finish my sketch, though I confess I shall leave spot when the first shadow of night comes on."

And after sketching all day he kept his word, and satisfied with his finished work, he set off for the tavern where he was stopping, and added another to the weird stories told of the Haunted Mill.

CHAPTER III.

DESERTED.

ADOWN the valley from the Haunted Mill and distant from it nearly a mile, was a cosy cottage, half-hidden in vines, and with the look of being the home of one who loved the duties of making it an abode of beauty.

A few acres surrounded it, a horse and cow were visible in the pasture, and upon the piazza, seated in an easy-chair, was an old man with silver locks and bent with age.

Rumor said that Henry Merwin had once been a rich merchant, but had lost his fortune by speculation, and a widower, with a only child, he had sought the valley as his home in which to end his days.

A small income kept him and his daughter from want, and enabled him to pay the small yearly rental for the little cottage farm, for he did not own it.

His daughter, Mary, at the time of her coming to the valley, was in her fifteenth year and a beautiful girl, with a loving nature, and wholly devoted to her father.

She had been reared in luxury in her earlier years, but at once went to work with a will upon reaching the cottage, and besides her household duties, found time to walk a mile to the country school each morning.

It was there she met Donald Lucas, for I write now of the past, when that wild, reckless youth was in his nineteenth year.

From their first meeting, the two seemed drawn toward each other, and when, one day, in crossing a rustic foot-bridge over a swollen stream, the frail structure gave way and threw Mary into the torrent, Donald, who happened to be near by gunning, hearing her cry, rushed to her rescue and saved her from certain death, they became more than friends, children though they were in years.

There is no doubt but that Donald Lucas loved Mary Merwin with all the strength of his nature; but he was too wedded to a wild life, too easily led into temptation by older and more vicious companions in the village, to be saved from the downward path, into which he was drifting, even by her influence.

Though most thankful to the youth for

saving the life of his child, Henry Merwin had never liked him, for once, when in the village, he had seen him drinking at the tavern-bar, and told Mary that one who began thus young to lead a life of dissipation, would go to the bad almost before manhood's prime.

At last the wild career of the young man became so marked that he was expelled from school, and Mr. Merwin from that day forbade his daughter to receive his visits, and himself ordered him from his house.

But Mary had learned to love Donald Lucas with all her heart, and was blind to the rapid failing of her father day by day, and deaf to his command, and time after time she stole from the cottage, and was wont to meet Donald in their favorite trysting place.

At last the thunderbolt fell, in the act that dyed Donald's hand with blood, and Mary would have flown to him in his prison-cell had it not been that the shock of the news, falling upon Mr. Merwin in his broken health, and knowing as he did, that his daughter loved the young reprobate, prostrated him with paralysis, and kept her at his side.

Day after day she hung over her dying father, expecting each moment that he would breathe his last, and yet her heart was with her lover being tried for his life.

At last the end came, for Donald Lucas was acquitted, and Henry Merwin died.

To his last resting-place the sorrowing girl followed her father's body, and saw the earth hide it forever from her view, and then, refusing every kind invitation of the neighbors to return to their homes with them, she went back to the lonely cottage, for there she felt that Donald would now come, for had he not, the day before, been proven "not guilty" of the charge against him?

But the night passed away; the day followed; still Donald Lucas came not.

At last a passing farmer told her the news: Donald Lucas had left his home forever, it was said, and folks were glad that he had, for it was a good riddance.

Passing by the post-office, the farmer had asked for her letters, and gave her one.

Mary Merwin heard the story of Donald's departure in silence, for she could not speak, and her heart seemed to stand still.

Mechanically she took the letter, and the old farmer rode on, too practical to understand what she suffered, too blind to see the agony in her face.

In the same way she broke the seal and read:

"MY DEAR MARY:

"As in all my sorrow and danger you have not been near me, I feel that I am forgotten, and hence

"HOME, Friday.

will not give myself the pain of bidding you a personal farewell.

"Like an earless boat I go adrift upon the world, to be carried whither the tide of circumstances may take me, and feeling that I have not even your love as an anchor to cling to.

"I have sinned, and I hope to repent.

"What my parents may have to leave me at their death, tell them to give to you, for you have a claim upon me.

"May you be happy is my prayer.

"Good-by.

"Yours, unhappily,

"DONALD."

With the letter in her clinched hand, eyes staring, lips quivering, Mary Merwin started to enter the cottage, but sunk down upon the threshold, with a moan as though her heart had broken in twain.

CHAPTER IV.

MOTHERLESS.

THE bleak winds were skurrying through the almost deserted streets of New York City, and the few wayfarers abroad drew their cloaks and shawls about them and hurried on, as though anxious to seek shelter within their homes, be they ever so humble.

Coming down the street, shrinking from the glare of the flickering gas-lights, was a woman, and she had her arms clasped over her breast, her heart, and her shawl drawn close about her.

She walked with a hesitating step, her eyes alternately glancing upward at the numbers on the houses, and then down at something she held in her arms.

Presently she halted in front of a large mansion, and started guiltily as the clock in a neighboring spire tolled the hour of twelve.

"Yes, this is his home, and his kind heart will not allow him to cast my nameless orphan from his door," she muttered.

Creeping cautiously into the area door she stooped down in the shadow of the stone steps, and then from her lips broke bitter sobs, as though her heart, not her body, was racked with pain.

For a long time she remained there, and at last arose and tottered, rather than walked, toward the iron gate.

"Ha! I have you, my lady! Been watching you for some time."

The voice was hoarse, the form that suddenly confronted her, that of a policeman, and he laid his heavy hand upon her form, which shrunk under his touch.

"Oh, sir, I have done nothing wrong," she gasped.

"That's what they all say, but I shall soon see."

Dragging her toward the door his foot touched something, and seizing his club from his belt, as though expecting to stumble

upon some horror, he bent over and grasped the object.

"Holy Commissioners! *it's a baby!*" he gasped, shrinking backward with more fear than he would have done, had he found a wild animal there, escaped from a menagerie.

The woman made no reply, and the policeman said:

"Hain't it a baby?"

"Yes."

"I knew it, for I kin allus tell a baby, if I am a bachelor. Is it your child?"

"Yes."

"This is old Van Loo's house, the millionaire?"

"Yes."

"Well, well! this looks mirste'ous, miss, or m'am, for I guess it's m'am, being as that are a baby, an' you say it's yourn; but all the same, I has got my duty ter do, an' that is plain."

"Oh, sir! what would you do?"

"Get better lodgings for you and the kid, than the streets are at this time of night."

"Oh! you will not take me and my child to jail?" pleaded the woman.

"I must, m'am. I'll take the child, and I guess you'll come along without trouble."

"No, no, *do not do this!*"

"Then must I ring and ask Mr. Van Loo if he wants the baby?"

"No, no, for that would ruin all. Take us to jail, sir," she said, with forced calmness.

Stooping over, the huge policeman raised the bundle of tiny humanity in his strong arms and moved out of the area.

It was a picture worthy of an artist's brush, to see the huge man of the law, carrying, nestled away in the shelter of his left arm, the tiny baby, while in his right he carried his club, as though more afraid of the infant than he would have been of a criminal, and, with her arms clasped imploringly, though no words came from her lips, was the heart-broken mother slowly following.

As the gaslight flashed upon them, the policeman turned and caught sight of the woman's face and form.

He beheld a slender figure, graceful and perfect in every outline, and neatly though plainly clad; while her face was youthful, being scarcely over eighteen, it seemed, pale, refined, and very beautiful.

The policeman had a kind heart in spite of his rough way, and that young mother's face and look touched him deeply, and he said in a stern tone:

"The man was a villain, miss, to desert you and your baby, pretty and innocent as you are."

"No, no; do not censure him, for I alone am to blame," she cried.

"Well, officer, what is this?" said a ringing, stern voice, as a gentleman with a cloak drawn around him suddenly halted, having heard the words of the woman.

The policeman under ordinary circumstances would have resented the interference of a stranger, but there was that in the air and tone of the gentleman that commanded instant respect, and proved he was not one to stand trifling.

"A poor young girl, sir, I found putting her baby in the area of a rich man's house, hoping to get it taken care of," answered the policeman.

The stranger glanced cautiously into the bundle held so gingerly on the officer's arm, and his gaze met two bright eyes fixed upon the gas-lamp, but which turned upon him, while a smile caused the tiny rosebud mouth to quiver.

Instinctively he bent over and kissed the wee face, and then turned upon the mother.

She met his gaze fairly, and he was struck with her beauty and her refined air in spite of her plain attire.

"Are you the mother of this child?" he asked.

"I am," was the firm reply.

"And his father?"

"God only knows where he is," she cried, with quivering lips.

"Answer me: did you wish to part with the child?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I am too poor to care for it, and there is no friend in the world to whom I can give it."

"One question more, and answer it frankly, as you have the others."

"Well, sir?"

"Are you married?"

She made no reply, but reaching forth her hand toward the baby, took up a gold chain that was around its neck, and upon which was hung a gold ring, plain and massive.

Her actions seemed to speak more than words would have done, for the stranger said quickly:

"Enough; I will take your child and raise it as my own."

"Oh, Heaven! I thank thee!" groaned the mother, burying her face in her hands.

"Officer, give me the child and I will be responsible for it."

"But my duty, sir, is to carry the child and her mother to the station."

"I will relieve you of that duty, my man. Here, take this little souvenir, give me the baby and let the mother go."

As he spoke the stranger slipped a bill of large denomination into the palm of the officer, and at the same time relieved him of the baby.

"All right, sir. May it grow up to bless your old age, sir.

"You are in luck, m'am, and so is the kid. Good-night," and the guardian of the city moved on, his hand clasping tightly the "souvenir" given him by the generous stranger.

"Now, my good woman, kiss your babe farewell, for from this night your paths in life divide forever."

The young mother seized her infant, pressed it in her arms passionately, and then seemed about to bound away with it in flight, but, thinking better of her intention, handed it back to the stranger with the cry:

"God bless you, or curse you according as your acts toward my child shall deserve."

The next instant she was gone, and the stranger stood gazing after her, the wee baby in his arms.

CHAPTER V.

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL.

SQUIRE MARTIN DALE, whose eloquence had saved Donald Lucas from the gallows, had, in the nearly a score of years that had passed since then, risen to the dignity of a county judge, and the neighbors said, had his eye upon a seat in Congress.

Seated one afternoon in his law office, just opposite to the town tavern, he saw a gentleman alight from the stage, and, after giving a carpet-sack to the porter, walk over toward where he was sitting in the open window.

There was something about the bearing and face of the stranger that looked familiar, and yet the judge could not remember where he had seen him before.

"Squire Dale, I believe, sir?" said the stranger, politely raising his hat.

The judge saw before him a man of fine physique, well dressed, and with a full bearded face, and hair turning gray.

His eyes were dark and piercing, his step firm, and there was a look of sternness upon his handsome face that indicated a man with whom the world had dealt harshly.

"Judge Dale, sir, Judge Martin Dale, sir, is my name," said the lawyer, with an emphasis upon the honorable title.

"I beg pardon, Judge Dale, but when I knew you, you were plain squire. I am glad to see that you have not stood still in the world," was the reply in the deep voice of the stranger.

"Be seated, sir, be seated, please. So, we have met before, as your words imply?" and still the judge could not place his visitor.

"We have, sir."

"I am sorry to say I have forgotten you then."

"I have not forgotten you, sir, nor ever shall, for you saved my life once."

"I saved your life?" repeated the judge, slowly.

"Yes, from the gallows! *I am Donald Lucas!*"

"Great God!" and the judge sprung to his feet, while the returned prodigal went on:

"Yes, I am Donald Lucas, whom, nearly twenty years ago, you saved from an ignominious death. You were paid for it, but you earned your money I frankly admit, and my lasting gratitude besides."

"Well, well! you, a man with almost white hair, and weighing near two hundred, the boyish-faced, slender, handsome boy who so nearly run his neck into a noose, and whose wild, prodigal, reckless life killed—"

The judge paused, but the other immediately said:

"Speak out, sir, and do not spare me, for you meant to say, whose evil life and desertion of them killed my poor old father and mother?" and the voice trembled, in spite of the effort Donald Lucas made to be calm.

"Yes, that is just what I meant to say, Donald, for you did break their hearts. But they were forgiving, and, dying, your father left you his sole heir."

"There was a mortgage on the place, I believe, raised to save my neck?" said Donald Lucas, in a low tone.

"Your father worked hard, and paid off every dollar of that, so the place is clear, though now it is little more than an old rookery, for it has been thirteen long years since a mortal foot has crossed its threshold, excepting a hair-brained, dare-devil of a young artist, who was down here two years ago, and painted it, passing one night there, and seeing the ghost that haunted it, he said."

"The place is haunted, then, it seems?" and Donald Lucas smiled grimly.

"Yes, so the village gossips say, and that young artist scared the country folk half out of their wits with his story."

"It is haunted only by the ghosts of bitter memories to me, Judge Dale. But I have seen the painting of that young artist, and it is perfect, except the ravages time and neglect have made."

"I was in a picture-gallery in New York, a month ago, and saw a crowd gathered before a painting of a large size, which had just been purchased, for a considerable sum, by a merchant prince of the metropolis."

"Beneath the painting was a placard upon which were some printed lines, and a man read them aloud:

"The Haunted Mill, situated in the Mohawk Valley, and with a strange history clinging around it."

for its heir was a wild youth who went to the bad, stained his hands with the life-blood of a friend, escaped the gallows, and is now a wanderer upon the face of God's green earth, while his parents, whose hearts he broke, lie side by side in the village church-yard, and their old home is crumbling to decay, deserted, desolate, and weird stories are told of spirits and specters that haunt the old ruin.'

"Judge Dale, every word uttered burned into my brain, and then, drawing nearer, I gazed upon the painting. One look was sufficient, and with a cry, I fell senseless. When I returned to consciousness a physician was bending over me; but I needed no aid, and hastily left the art gallery, and now I am here to claim my own, to say that the dear old mill shall no longer be a haunted ruin, but my *home*."

"But the ghosts, Donald?" demurred the judge, who was by no means free from the superstitious dread he laid at the door of the gossips.

"There are no ghosts there that I dread, sir, and there will I live, for I am tired of wandering about the world, and have come home to live and die."

CHAPTER VI.

DONALD LUCAS MAKES A DISCOVERY.

THAT Judge Dale was greatly surprised, at the sudden decision of the heir to the Haunted Mill, to make it his home, was evident, for he urged strongly against it.

But, seeing that Donald Lucas was determined, he offered no further resistance to it, but said:

"Well, the lands have run down for the want of tilling, and the mill and house are not much more than a ruin; but such as they are I will turn them over to you as the heir, and along with the place the money left by your father, and which, with the interest accumulating all these years, is a considerable sum, fully ample to set things to right and get the old wheel turning again, and I tell you the mill is needed."

"I thank you, Judge Dale, for your kind stewardship and care, and hope you will deduct all due yourself. I will now ride out to the old home and make a statement of what repairs I need, and what furniture, and beg that you put carpenters and laborers at once on the place and lands, so that all may be ready for me when I return, which will be in a month's time."

"I'll do it, Donald, but you'll have a lonesome time of it," said the judge.

But the heir of the Haunted Mill only smiled grimly, and set out for the home of his boyhood, mounted on a horse he had hired from the tavern stables.

With a feeling of awe he approached the spot, every scene of which was so familiar to

his eyes. He sighed as he saw the weed-grown drive, and gazed at the young forests of thickets that had sprung up in the years that had passed since he went away. The garden-fence had tumbled down, yet the roses still bloomed amid the scene of desolation.

The old mill and house were weather-stained, a board here and there was loose, a few shutters had tumbled down, window panes were broken, and the front door was open, and swung with a dismal, creaking sound to and fro.

The murmur of the mill-stream greeted his ears but the huge water-wheel was still, and its paddles were moss-grown.

The barn, some distance off, presented the same time-worn appearance, and Donald Lucas bit his lip hard to keep back the groans that surged up from his heart.

"True, too true!" he muttered; "the old place is haunted, but with the ghost of bitter memories only."

Entering the front door he stood in the half-hall, half-room, where the artist had passed the night, and gazed around him. His form trembled, and his lips quivered, but he uttered no word, and moved on through the building.

The dining-room, large parlor, once cosy sitting-room, spacious kitchen were all visited in turn, and then he walked out upon the back piazza, and gazed into the woodshed, where piles of wood, evidently cut and sawed by his dead father, half filled the space.

From there he ascended to the floor above, and turned into the large room upon his right, which had been his father's and mother's.

As below stairs, excepting the touches that Time had made, all remained as the old miller and his wife had left them.

Sinking into an easy-chair, he buried his face in his hands and groaned in agony of spirit.

For a long time he sat there, but at last arose, and going out in the end of the hall unlocked and opened a door at its further end. It led into the mill, and as he stepped into the spacious building, his footfall gave back a solemn echo that almost startled him.

Leaving the mill, he returned to the house, and glanced into several guest-rooms, where the hospitable miller and his wife were often wont to entertain visiting kindred and friends.

At the end of another hall was a wing, and up a few steps a door, upon the latch of which his hand rested for some time, seemingly without courage to open it; but at last, with a sudden effort he threw it open and stepped within.

Instantly he started back with surprise, for there was that in it which proved it had lately held an occupant!

The pillows and bed were pressed, as from a human form, and the room did not present the deserted air which hung upon all the others.

It was a large chamber, had been the one he had occupied from his earliest boyhood, up to the day of his departure, and he had not entered it since the fatal morning he had left home to dye his hand in the blood of a fellow-being.

The pictures on the wall, the chairs, the books, were free from the dust and mold of years, the bedding looked clean, and the rag carpet was well swept.

And in that rag-carpet, made for him by his mother's hands, he recognized a piece of a roundabout he had worn as a little boy, and shreds of his first pair of pants.

Overwhelmed by the emotions that swept down upon him from the past like an avalanche of memory, he threw himself upon the bed; and for a long time lay like one unconscious.

But at last he arose, passed his hand slowly across his forehead, and said:

"There then is some cause for the strange rumors that this old place is haunted, for certainly some one dwells within this room, and has not been long away. Who can it be?"

That question he could not answer, and slowly he retraced his way out of doors, made a few hasty notes on paper of what he wanted done, and mounting his horse, turned into the path leading down the stream.

But only a short distance had he gone when he drew rein, for a moment was lost in deep thought, and then turned back, muttering:

"No, no; not to-day can I go there; but another day, for now I am unnerved by my visit to this, the old home of my boyhood."

CHAPTER VI.

MYSTERIOUS FOOTSTEPS.

It was the gossip of the neighborhood for miles around that Donald Lucas had returned to his inheritance, and once more dwelt under the roof-tree that had sheltered his boyhood.

And more—he had not come back alone, for he was accompanied by his wife and daughter.

Those who had seen the former described her as a handsome, serious-faced woman of forty, and perhaps older, who dressed well and seemed content to dwell at her home engaged in the duties of her household.

Of the daughter it was said that she was a

beautiful, sunny-haired, blue-eyed girl of seventeen, with a slender, graceful form and the very picture of health and happiness.

She had her pony, and had been seen dashing through the forests alone, or rather with a huge Newfoundland for her escort, and again, with her sleeves rolled up and apron on, she had been observed by some one whom business called to the place, churning butter, washing dishes and otherwise aiding her sad-faced mother.

The old mill was still almost a ruin, for nothing had been done to that, and Donald Lucas refused the pressure brought upon him to set its water-wheel going once more.

But the house had been repaired and painted, and a great deal of the old furniture had been sent up to the garret and new replaced it, while the grounds had been put in order, the farm had a couple of hands tilling its soil, and cattle and horses and sheep dotted the pastures, giving to all an air of thrift and homely comfort.

No longer were people afraid to go by the road that led to the old place, hurrying on, as though expecting a hail from some ghostly occupant; but instead, they were wont to pause and gaze upon the attractive spot, with its flower-garden and neat fences, and wonder how Donald Lucas dare live there.

There were many in the neighborhood who had made up their minds upon learning of the coming back of the heir, to cut him dead, remembering that he had the curse of Cain upon him, had broken his parents' hearts, and that it was said had driven poor Mary Merwin to die by her own hand, for rumor had it that such had been her end after she had gone to the great city to live.

But Donald Lucas nipped these intentions of the neighbors in the bud, by coolly riding by with a stare at those whom he had known well in the long ago, and never returning the cold nods of those who felt compelled to speak to him.

To those who frankly offered their hands, his stern manner was unbent, and they found him a man who seemed to have buried the past, and forbid, by his austere manner, any reference to it, but yet by no means the dissipated, reckless profligate he had been twenty years before.

When it was known that he had brought back a wife with him, and that, in spite of all wishes of idle gossips to the contrary, she was a lady, some wished to know her, and others thought of poor Mary Merwin and shook their heads.

Once they had seen Leone Lucas, the beautiful daughter, and a change came over the gossips, and they were sorry they had been so severe upon the father; but he held

them aloof, and seemed to care nothing for their hatred or friendship.

Some said he was rich, for Judge Dale had so reported, and others said that he had only the farm to depend upon for a living.

And thus it went on, that Donald Lucas and his family were the morsel of gossip rolled around upon every tongue, and enjoyed with a gusto with which all seeming mysteries are relished.

In the mean time the crops were put in the ground by the two farm hands, and Miller Don, as he was called, aided with his own hands, and the household duties were thoroughly attended to by Mrs. Lucas and Leone.

The two farm hands reported that the family lived well, and that Miller Don was kind, but silent, and his wife kind yet with little to say, while the daughter was a sunbeam in the household, and seemed the idol of her parents' hearts.

In the evenings Leone was wont to take her guitar and sing as sweetly as any bird, or play chess or backgammon with her father, while her mother sewed, and if there was any skeleton in the closet of Miller Don's house, the two farm hands had not been able to discover it, or even hear the rattling of its dry bones.

Before the world Donald Lucas was a stern, silent, unforgiving man, but in his own home he was a kind and loving husband and father,

Of a romantic nature, the grand old mill of stone, and its connecting farm-house of wood, were objects of great interest to Leone Lucas, and soon she learned to love the woodlands, pleasant fields and pastures surrounding the home, while she was wont to spend hours walking along the banks of the stream, gathering wild flowers, or fishing in the deep pools.

On rainy days Leone used to explore the vast recesses of the mill from basement to attic, and the house had also been closely examined by the maiden, excepting the two rooms in the south wing, and on the second floor.

Upon the door of these was a padlock, and her father held the key, and all she knew regarding the contents of those mysterious chambers, was what she had been told, viz.: that they contained olden time treasures of the Lucas household, such as old furniture and odds and ends that had belonged to grandpa and grandma Lucas.

One evening as the family sat in the supper-room, which was under the locked chambers, footsteps were heard overhead.

All looked up with surprise, for the two farm-hands were in their accustomed places, Donald Lucas sat at the foot, and his wife at

the head of the table, and Leone, as usual, was upon her father's right hand.

With the household all at supper, who could it be in the room above? Besides, were not those the locked chambers, entrance to which was allowed to no one by Miller Don?

"That certainly was a footstep, Donald," said Mrs. Miller with surprise, while the farm-hands turned pale, and Leone became deeply interested, for of course her father would investigate the cause of the noise, and she would hold the lamp for him, and thus get a chance to invade that *terra incognita* to her.

At the sound first heard Donald Lucas had said quietly, though his face changed color:

"It is nothing, wife."

But when again there was heard a distinct step, and then a noise, as though an object had been let fall upon the floor, he had turned deadly pale, and the farm-hands had half risen, as though to dash out into the darkness, while from the lips of one came the suppressed cry:

"Ghosts!"

"Silence, you idiot! It probably is the cat after a rat and he has knocked something over, that is all," sternly said Miller Don, and with this explanation all were compelled to be satisfied.

But several hours after, when Donald Lucas sat alone in the sitting-room, his wife and daughter having retired, and the farm-hands gone to their little cabin some distance away from the mill-house, he said slowly:

"That sound was certainly a footfall crossing the room, and now that all is quiet I will solve the mystery."

CHAPTER VII.

SOLVING THE MYSTERY.

AFTER his remark, which showed that he had not believed his own assertion, that rats had made the sounds in the locked chambers, Donald Lucas listened attentively and heard nothing about the house to indicate that all were not sleeping. Then he took up his lamp, and armed with a stout cane, ascended to the floor above.

The rooms of his wife and daughter were in the front of the house, and far removed from the wing, to which a long hallway led. Going down this passageway he soon halted at the short stairway leading to the deserted wing. Only the wind without, for it was blowing hard, and the ripple of the mill-stream broke the silence, and, taking from his pocket a key, he inserted it into the padlock.

To his shove the door opened with a

creaking sound, and quickly Miller Don passed within, and closed it behind him.

He stood in a small entry into which two doors opened, one on the right, the other on the left. Both of these were above the large kitchen eating-room, as the chamber below was called, and where the family had been seated at supper when the sounds were heard.

Again he used a key, opening the door upon his right. The room was crowded with furniture, which was so closely packed that it was evident that not even a ghost could walk across the floor.

"No; it was in my own room, as I thought. How strange it is the dread I have of going there, when I loved the room so in my boyhood days," muttered Miller Don, as he relocked the door, and taking another key, placed it in the lock of the portal on his left.

For a moment he hesitated before turning the key; and then, as though having made up his mind to brave all he might meet there, he unlocked the door, and gently throwing it open, stepped within.

Holding the light in his left hand and a cane in the right, he thus stood gazing into the chamber.

It was just as he had left it when the reader beheld him on his former visit to the room of his boyhood, yet *with one exception*.

It was evident that the workmen had not been allowed to enter that room, and Miller Don believed that no one could do so, or had done so, for faithfully he had guarded the keys.

And yet, there upon the bed before him, lay a human form! It was robed in white, and lay as still as the dead, and no start of surprise had been made at his entrance.

Nearer he approached and saw that the hands were clasped over the heart and the eyes were closed, while the face was as pale as the dead.

The lamp and cane nearly fell from the hands of Donald Lucas, and his own face rivaled that of the recumbent form in pallor when he gazed upon the one before him.

Like one frozen with horror, he stood motionless, and yet with heart and every nerve quivering, and then from his lips broke a cry of two words:

"Good God!"

Quickly he turned, the lamp swaying wildly as he tottered toward the door, and his nerveless hands could hardly turn the key and afterward fit the padlock in its place.

Retreating to the sitting room he set down the lamp, threw aside his cane, and sinking upon the sofa, buried his face in his hands, while he groaned forth:

"God in Heaven have mercy upon me, for I am a haunted man."

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT A GRAVESTONE REVEALED.

SEATED upon the back of her pony gazing with intense interest at the scene spread out before her, Leone Lucas seemed wholly unmindful, in her admiration of the beauty of the landscape, that a storm was rising with almost fearful rapidity, and she several miles from home.

As she sat there on her rean pony, which showed signs of impatience at the dallying of his young mistress, no one would have looked upon Leone Lucas and not called her beautiful in both face and form.

In spite of her being a country girl, her figure was willowy and slender, lacking the robustness supposed to be so natural to young ladies reared upon a farm.

Her face was spirituelle in its beauty, and her hair long and golden, while her eyes were blue, and would have been sad-looking but for the look of mischief ever dwelling in them.

She wore a close-fitting riding-habit of gray cloth, a slouch hat and crimson plume and gauntlets covered her small hands.

At heart, Leone was an artist, and she had, a short while before, suddenly come upon a view, which had escaped her in her former rides, and she was drinking in the lovely landscape, with no thought of the gathering storm, until the roar of thunder warned her to be on her way homeward at once.

It was a five-mile gallop, she knew, and her horse was already fagged with the ride she had given him, while, though there were numerous farm-houses near, she would not ask for shelter in one of them, for she had seen enough to know that her father was not a popular man in the neighborhood.

Away she dashed at full speed, but seeing that she would be overtaken by the rain, she decided to go into the church-yard near, and seek shelter under the side door, where the roof extended to quite a distance.

It was a lonely spot, for the nearest farm-house was a quarter of a mile away; but opening the gate, Leone dashed up to the church, and, dismounting, sought the cover of the little porch that projected from the side door.

Just then the rain fell in torrents, and she shrunk back under the shelter, while she pitied her pony that he too could not be protected.

Before her were the monuments of the dead, and a large tomb, not twenty feet away, riveted her gaze, and twice over she read the inscription, her face becoming paler

and paler, and her eyes flashing as she did so. What the young girl read was:

"SACRED TO THE MEMORY
OF
LEON SCOTT,

who was murdered July 1st, 18—, by the hand of his pretended friend, Donald Lucas."

"Now I see the weight that rests upon my poor father, and yet I cannot, will not believe, that he could willfully take the life of a fellow-being, let alone one he called his friend. Oh! that I had not come here, and this sad leaf of my father's past had not been opened for me to read! Leon Scott was his name, and mine is *Leone Scott Lucas*. Oh! what fatality made my father name me after the man whose life he took? I cannot stay here near this spot, where the revenge of those who loved that man has made them inscribe my father's guilt upon his tomb. Come, Rambler, better the rain and storm than a shelter like this."

In spite of the drenching rain, the vivid lightning and pealing thunder, which seemed to shake the earth, Leone Lucas sprung into her saddle, and dashed away from the spot now so hateful to her, in spite of its being sacred as the last resting-place of the dead.

CHAPTER IX.

DAVID DUNN.

It was an unfortunate circumstance for Leone, that she saw the leaf of the past which the tombstone of Leon Scott revealed, for it told her of an idolized father's guilt, and a seeming remorse that led him to name her after the man he had slain.

She was indignant, and became almost reckless as she dashed along, with set teeth, and pale face, urging Rambler into a run that seemed to astonish him greatly.

On through the drenching rain sped the horse, passing comfortable farm-houses here and there that would have willingly offered her shelter, but toward which the distressed girl did not even turn her head.

At last she was compelled to draw rein, and Rambler gladly halted, for before her was a foaming torrent.

The road on either side of the bridge, which spanned the mill stream was under water, and surging along five feet deep was a current that barred her further progress, unless she was reckless and daring enough to attempt it.

Brave as she was she hesitated at the danger she would have to incur, and sat for a moment, with the rain pouring down upon her in a merciless torrent.

It was fully sixty yards to the bridge, which was above the torrent, and then beyond

there was a piece of road under water for a long distance, which she would have to pass through, to reach the high land beyond.

The bridge was covered and would protect her from the rain, once she reached it, but as she was already wet through, it would be better for her not to tarry, but to press on home.

Rambler was by no means willing to risk crossing, and thinking better of her determination, Leone suddenly turned to the right about, and galloped back to a farm-house a quarter of a mile distant.

She had never entered the house of but one person, and that one Judge Dale, since coming to her father's old home, and she cared not to do so now; but, under the circumstances she could do nothing else.

Riding in at the massive gate, she urged her horse close to the piazza, and, not having seen any one, was about to spring off, when the door opened and a person appeared.

It was a woman, with an almost hard face, so set was it in expression, gray hair, and dark, penetrating eyes.

She was well dressed, and all about the house and farm indicated that the occupants were well-to-do in life.

"I am sorry to trouble you, madam, but the creek between here and my home, is so overflowed I dare not cross, so must claim your hospitality for a few hours," said Leone.

"You are Donald Lucas's daughter, are you not?" came in cold, set tones.

"I am, madam."

"I am the mother of Leon Scott, girl, whom your father murdered twenty years ago."

A cry broke from the lips of poor Leone, and wheeling her pony she dashed away like the wind, almost reeling in her saddle, while the grim, stern woman stood gazing after with a feeling of gratified revenge that her words had hit hard, though they fell upon an innocent head.

Down the road went Leone at full speed, and when Rambler would have paused again at the flood, the whip cruelly descended upon him, and with a snort of rage he bounded into the torrent.

The creek had risen still higher since Leone had been away, and Rambler found it most difficult to keep his feet in the surging current; but Leone held him on his way with a steady hand and a nerve that did not desert her; the bridge was not far distant, and she gave a sigh of relief.

But just then a warning cry came from the bridge, and she saw a man standing in the entrance.

"Quick! urge your horse on, or you will be lost, for do you not see that tree?"

Her eyes then fell upon a huge tree, torn from its place on the bank, and bearing down with irresistible force directly upon her.

She instantly discovered her inability to escape it by moving toward the bridge, and determined to turn Rambler and make for the shore she had left. But in turning Rambler's hind feet sunk into a hole, and before he could recover himself the tree was upon them.

The person in the bridge who had hailed, and warned the maiden of her danger, seemed to have anticipated just what had happened, for he had thrown aside his coat, hat and shoes, and bounded into the torrent. A few vigorous strokes brought him to the tree, just as it struck Rambler a stunning blow, burying him beneath the waters.

Catching hold of a branch, Leone had saved herself from being engulfed with her horse, but as some of the under limbs struck the bottom, the trunk swayed violently and she was shaken from her hold, and fell back into the torrent.

Running along the tree-trunk with nimble feet, the man, who had so boldly gone to her rescue, at this moment sprung into the water beside her and seized her in his arms.

With a strong stroke he freed himself from the proximity of the tree, and getting into comparatively still water, where the supports of the bridge broke the tearing current, he soon gained a solid footing.

Still holding Leone close in his arms, wholly conscious and calm, for her nerve did not desert her, her preserver, after a few brief struggles gained the bridge, and set her down beneath the shelter of its roof, while, utterly exhausted by his violent struggles for life, he sunk down upon the flooring, unable to speak.

Unable to help him, Leone could but stand and gaze upon him in pity, her hands clasped, and her lips moving, as though she uttered a prayer, and her eyes fixed upon him.

She saw a large-bodied, honest-faced young man of twenty perhaps.

He was dressed in homespun, a carpet-sack lay near him upon the bridge floor, alongside of his hat, shoes and coat, and he was evidently a foot-traveler.

There was a manliness and resolution in his face, which his bold act had proven was not stamped there in vain, and he was a hero, but by no means a dashing, handsome one, who had risked life to save Leone.

"I hope you are better, sir," she said, after a few moments.

"Yes, but I almost believed my breath was going, and if I had had only myself to

save, I'd never have made the bridge," he answered, in a frank, earnest tone.

"It was a desperate struggle, and I was unable to aid you, though I can swim a little."

"Those little hands could do no good in such a torrent, miss; it takes big, rough ones like mine, and they nearly failed me."

"But they did not fail you, and I owe you my life, and it is a debt I can never repay you if I live a hundred years; but rest assured that Leone Lucas will ever be your friend," and she grasped his hand in both her own, and, bending over suddenly, with the impulsiveness of her nature, pressed a kiss upon it.

He jerked it away as though a wasp had stung him, and his face flushed crimson, while he said, in an embarrassed way:

"Lord, miss, don't do that, for you make me ashamed, and I only did what I oughter."

"You risked your life, for you took fearful odds, to save me."

"I saw you were gone, when your horse went under, if I didn't try to save you, and I'm awful glad I tried; but I am sorry your horse was drowned, for I never saw him after the tree struck him."

"Poor Rambler! he was a good pony, and my recklessness cost him his life," and the tears came into Leone's beautiful eyes.

"Don't cry, miss, for the law of nature has it, the brute must suffer for the human. But are you the daughter of Miller Don Lucas, as I heard you call your name awhile since?"

"Yes; Mr. Donald Lucas is my father," and Leone slightly winced, for, after her late experience, she knew not what to expect.

"I was going to see your father, miss, for I have a letter from Judge Dale, asking him to give me a place as farm-hand with him, as the judge said the two men he has are to leave."

"Yes, and I know my father will be glad to have you, especially when he learns that you saved the life of his daughter."

"Don't let that urge my claims, miss, for I am a good hand, if I say it, as shouldn't."

"I have no doubt of it; but did you learn why the two hands were leaving?"

"Yes, miss."

"What was it?" and Leone gazed fixedly at the young farmer.

"They say the house and mill are haunted."

"True; and do you not fear ghosts?"

"No, miss; I believe I am more afraid of living folks than dead ones."

"Well said; but do you not think we could venture to cross the flat to high land, for night is coming on?"

"Yes, miss, for I am rested now, and can easily swim with you, if I have to. You carry my traps, miss, and I'll carry you."

An hour after, Donald Lucas, who was just going out to search for his daughter, becoming alarmed at her long absence, saw her suddenly burst into the house, accompanied by a big, honest-faced young man, whom she introduced thus:

"This is David Dunn, papa and mamma, who just saved me from death."

CHAPTER X.

AN ANGEL ON A FARM.

HAD not David Dunn brought a letter of recommendation from Donald Lucas's only friend, Judge Dale, and had he not saved the life of the very idol of the owner of Mill Farm, his honest face would have gained him a situation as farmer.

The two leaving hands tried hard to frighten him away, with all manner of ghostly stories of lights being seen at night in the uninhabited part of the house, footsteps heard crossing the floor, with moans, and sounds of weeping.

But David Dunn was no coward, and owned no such thought as fear of forms in the flesh or in the spirit, and he remained at the farm.

From the day of his coming it was evident to Donald Lucas and his wife that they had gotten a treasure, for, once his duties were shown him, they were done with a dispatch that was remarkable, and he not only accomplished more than his two predecessors had, but he found time to gather a bunch of wild flowers for Leone each morning, while the dew was yet upon them, and when he appeared at breakfast, neatly dressed for the meal, he had already done a day's work for an ordinary man.

Did Mrs. Lucas want any odd repairs done, David did it with the skill of a carpenter, and Donald Lucas could not but admit that his horses and cattle looked better, the crops were more thoroughly worked, and in fact, everything looked more prosperous under the never tiring hands of Dunn.

The judge had said in his letter that David Dunn came of a good family; but reverses coming upon his father, he had stayed at home and worked for his parents, until their death, and debt took the farm from him, for all was swept away by the creditors.

Then he had sought a place as a farmer, and a month after he had been at Mill Farm, David had replied to the judge, when asked how he liked it there:

"I thank God, sir, for such a home, and that my lot is cast among such kind people."

"But the neighbors say Miller Don is a very stern, hard man, David?"

"They don't know him, judge."

"So I say; he went to the bad in his younger days, and has much to answer for; but, if ever a man repented of his sins, and has thoroughly changed, Donald Lucas is that man."

"So I say, sir."

"But have you seen no ghosts there, David?" continued the judge.

"No, sir; or that is, there are sounds and lights there at times, which I cannot account for; but, as the miller does not trouble himself about ghosts being in the house, it is no business of mine."

"Then you have heard strange noises, and seen strange sights there, David?"

"Yes, sir. My room is in the house, and not in the cabin, where the other men slept, and I do not understand all I see and hear."

"Well, there certainly is some mystery connected with the old mill, and you are cool-headed and fearless enough to solve it, if you wish to. But what do you think of Don's daughter, David?"

"Judge Dale, if ever there was an angel on earth, it is Leone Lucas," fervently answered David, and that response, more than anything else that I can say, kind reader, will show the tenor of the young farmer's feelings in regard to the girl whose life he had saved.

What were the feelings of Leone, toward the man who had saved her life, the sequel will show.

CHAPTER XI.

MILLER DON RECEIVES A LETTER.

ONE evening David Dunn came from town just at supper-time, and handed Miller Don a letter.

Donald Lucas slightly changed color, for a letter was something he seldom received, as he had no correspondents, nor seemed to care to write to any one.

His wife, too, looked up somewhat anxiously as he broke the seal, and watched his face as he read the letter.

"Mamma, you have forgotten to give David any tea," said Leone, quietly; and recalled to herself, Mrs. Lucas poured out a cup of tea, while her husband slightly frowned, showing that he was not exactly pleased with the letter's contents.

"Wife, I have here a letter from Henry Herndon, to whom you remember I owe some favors in the past," said Donald Lucas, quietly.

"Yes, he proved your friend on one occasion, I remember."

"Well, knowing through Judge Dale, with whom he has legal correspondence, it seems, that I was settled in this valley, he

writes to ask if I will not take a young friend of his to board for a short time."

"We do not have to take boarders, Donald."

"True, wife, nor do I wish it; but then Herndon goes on to say that his friend, who is an artist, made a great reputation by a painting he executed of a scene in our valley, and he is desirous of spending a few weeks here, just to make sketches for future work, and asks it as a special favor to him for us to take him."

"Why does he not go where he stayed when here before?" asked Mrs. Lucas, who evidently liked not the idea of a stranger invading the privacy of their home.

"That Herndon explains by saying he put up at the tavern in the village then, but had to go too far to find good views, and wished to dwell immediately in the valley."

"Well, what do you say, Donald?"

"I can but grant Herndon's request under the circumstances."

"So I think; and you may as well write to him that we will take his friend. And, Donald, why can we not put the rubbish you tell me is in the wing rooms overhead in the mill, and fit those up for him?"

The face of Donald Lucas again changed color, but he answered quietly and firmly:

"No."

"But the view from those windows must be grand, and as he is an artist he—"

"No, wife; the things in those rooms must not be disturbed. Give him the blue room that looks up the valley," said the man almost sternly, and he arose and left the table.

The next day the letter of Mr. Herndon was answered, and Donald Lucas wrote that it would be a pleasure to entertain his friend as long as he chose to remain.

The letter was given to Leone by her father, with the request to give it to David to mail in town, and Donald Lucas took his gun and stalked away for an afternoon's hunt.

Leone took up the letter and gazed upon the address with a far-away look. Was it a presentiment of what was to be that made her sigh and murmur:

"I hope the letter will miscarry?"

With another sigh she took up her sun-hat and started off to look up David Dunn. She found him hitching the horse to the wagon to go into town with a load of farm produce, and she handed him the letter.

He took it as though it possessed great weight, gazed at it in silence and looked down.

"David, papa says please mail that letter for him."

"I will, Leone, but I don't want to," he said sadly.

"Why, David, why should you not wish to mail an innocent little letter?" and she arched her brows and looked mischievous.

"Because, I do not think it is an innocent little letter."

"You surprise me, David, for what can there be in the letter for you to wish not to mail it?"

"I heard your father say last night what was in the one he received from his friend."

"Oh yes, and we'll just make that artist draw the old house with us all on the piazza."

"And you wish him to come, Leone?"

"Well—I—do—not—know."

"I know I do not."

"And I may as well say that I do not care to have a stranger in our home; but as he is coming, I wish papa had allowed mamma to put him in those haunted rooms."

"Your father knows best, Leone."

"Yes, but I guess the artist would not have stayed long if he had been given those rooms, for, David, I *do* believe there is a ghost in there."

"Don't be a child, Leone."

"And I am not a child, for I am nearly eighteen, and I can but feel there is a mystery about those rooms, and I would give much to see in them, and I know mother would, too, though papa looks so black when we propose it, we dare not say more about it. Do you think the house is haunted, David?"

"I know not what to think, Leone; but I do know that I do not wish that artist to come here."

"What is your reason, David, for not wanting him?"

"Well, I will then be cast aside and be forgotten."

"No, no, David, for how can I forget you, when every day you bring me pretty flowers, and are always making me little souvenirs, not to speak of my owing to you my life? No, David, don't think that I could forget you."

"But can you love me, Leone?" blurted out the young farmer in a tone that trembled at the words he uttered.

"Of course I love you, David."

"But not as you do others, Leone, do I wish you to love me, but to let me be to you all that I would wish. I came here an ignorant booby, and for your sweet sake I have studied hard, and tried to make a man of myself. Oh, Leone, I have tried ever so hard to be worthy of your sweet love, and to win your heart, that one day you might be my wife. I am poor, excepting a few hundreds that I have saved up, but I asked your father and mother if I might love you, and they told me yes, but only to wait awhile.

"I have waited, Leone, and would have waited longer, only this hated letter causes

me to have a great dread at the heart, and, ere I send it on its way, I would hear from your lips what is to be my fate.

He had taken her hand as he spoke, and without withdrawing it, she stood, looking down upon the ground, and writing her name with the toe of her boot.

As she remained silent, he asked in an earnest, quivering voice:

"Speak, Leone, can you ever love such as I am?"

"I do not know what love really is, David; but I think I could be happy as your wife, for you are so good, so true and noble, and where would I be to-day, but for you?"

The tears came into her eyes as she spoke, and over his honest, sunburnt face flashed a look of inexpressible joy.

And to town David Dunn went, his heart full of happiness, and the letter was posted and went on its fateful way.

CHAPTER XII.

DAVID'S PLEDGE.

ABOUT a week after the posting of the letter to Mr. Herndon, Leone, who was in the village, took out of the office a letter for her father, that was addressed in a bold hand, post-marked New York.

It was not from Mr. Herndon, for she had seen that gentleman's writing, and her curiosity was considerably excited to know from whom it had come.

She drove up to the door, just as tea was ready, and David, hearing the roll of her phaeton's wheels, went out and met her, taking her horse to the stable.

"Another letter, David; guess it's from some one else who wants board," she said, gayly, as she went into the house and handed the letter to her father.

"Wife, it is from the artist, and he certainly writes a gentlemanly letter," said Donald Lucas, and handing it to his daughter, he continued:

"Read it aloud, Leone."

The maiden took the letter, and read:

"STUDIO BUILDING, }
New York. }

"MR. DONALD LUCAS:

"MY DEAR SIR—Our mutual friend, Mr. Henry Herndon, has informed me of your very kind affirmative to his request, to give me accommodation in your house for a few weeks, and I hasten to thank you for so doing, promising to be as little trouble in your family as it is possible for a bachelor Bohemian to be."

"If agreeable, you may expect me within the month."

"With best wishes,

"Sincerely yours,

"ROY ARUNDEL."

As Leone finished the letter, David entered

and took his seat quietly; but it was evident to the maiden that he liked not the coming of the "city chap, with his handsome face and fine manners," as he spoke of the young artist.

Nor did Mrs. Lucas seem to like the thought of his coming, though she said little regarding it; but her husband rather longed for a break, it seemed, in the monotony of every-day life, and it must be confessed that Leone had an anxious curiosity regarding what the stranger was like.

That evening, after supper, Leone and David sat alone on the piazza, listening to the rippling of the mill-stream as it swept by only a few rods distant, and enjoying the balmy spring breeze, rather than talking, for they were both silent with their thoughts.

Donald Lucas was reading his paper in the sitting-room, and his wife was sewing, so that there was silence within the house as well as without.

"I'll give you a new riding-whip for your thoughts," suddenly said David.

"And if you promise to do me a favor I will tell you them, David," was the ready answer.

"Done, Leone, you shall have the whip and I'll do what you ask me."

"Shake hands on it," and he gladly grasped the little hand she held forth to him.

"Well, sir, I was thinking that I would like to know just what it is that haunts the rooms in the south wing, not only by night, but by day; and the favor I ask of you is to find out for me."

"But, Leone—"

"Remember, sir, I have your promise."

He was taken aback, for he had, in his jealous imaginings, believed she was thinking of the coming artist.

"Your father, Leone, would be very angry with me, did I invade a place he wished kept from intrusion."

"He shall not know it."

"Would you keep it secret from him?"

"Yes, I would."

"I am not deceitful, David, as you know, and I tell my parents everything; but I believe father is blind to the fact that there is something startlingly mysterious in those rooms."

"I believe that there is, Leone."

"I know it, for only last night I lay awake, and I distinctly heard the sound of distant weeping. "It did not come from mother's room, for I came to listen, thinking she had one of her severe sick headaches!"

"And it came from the direction of the south wing?"

"Yes, David, for I heard the sound coming from the end of that long hall."

"I too have heard the same sounds, Leone; but we had better leave the mystery unsolved."

"No, if you won't find out what, or whom, those rooms contain, *I will*."

"No, Leone, you must not do so."

"Then, will you?"

"They are locked."

"I know that."

"And you father has the key."

"That I know also; but there is another way to reach them."

"By the long ladder outside?"

"No, for it is not long enough."

"How then, Leone?"

"I was in the old mill this morning, and I went into the attic, and there I found a small, crescent-shaped window that was open."

"Looking out of it, I saw that it was over the back window of one of the rooms, the one that has a small balcony projecting from it."

"Well, Leone?"

"It is easy enough with a rope to lower yourself down, from that window in the mill, upon the little balcony, and then you can see into the room, if you cannot enter it, should the window be fastened down."

"And you wish me to do this, Leone?"

"I do, and have your pledge."

"For you I will do it, though I dislike to act against your father's wishes."

"He shall not know of it, I promise you."

"Well, Leone, for your sake I will start on my ghost-hunt in a few nights."

"Thank you, David, and then I will be content, for, as long as the mystery of those rooms remains unsolved, there is a great weight here," and she placed her hand upon her heart.

"And even now, Leone, I feel a great weight here, a foreboding of coming evil, it seems," and rising abruptly he sought his room, leaving the maiden surprised at his strange humor.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GHOST-HUNTER.

It was several nights after his promise to Leone that David Dunn determined to carry out the plan to discover the secret of the mysterious chambers.

In the mean time, hoping to discover something by a close watch, which would not necessitate the invasion of the rooms, he was on the alert for all suspicious sounds and circumstances.

There was one thing that he did discover by watching, and that was that the ghost was certainly no myth, as, when he knew he

was wide awake, he certainly heard a foot-step pacing to and fro over his head as he sat in the darkness below waiting and watching.

Going out into the yard late the following night, he beheld a misty light shining from the window with the little balcony.

It was a dim light, and soon upon the window fell a shadowy form, as though reflected from a low-burning lamp, or weird flame of some kind.

For a long time he watched, and at last the light faded away, and he returned to his room to meditate over the strange sight he had seen and sounds that he had heard.

David Dunn was no coward; in fact he was one of those few natures wholly devoid of fear; but there was something in all this that he could not account for, and his practical mind was almost led to believe in the supernatural.

That he was interested in solving the mystery there was not a shadow of a doubt; but then he was of a retiring nature, and when he felt that Donald Lucas, who knew well of all these sounds in his house, made no effort to discover the cause, it was no affair of his to do it.

Still he had pledged his word to Leone, and he would keep it, be the consequences what they might.

During the next day he gained entrance to the mill, and going up to the attic, found the crescent window closed and bolted from the inside, although Leone had told him she had left it open.

Looking out at the window he saw the balcony some twenty feet below him, and knew, as the windows fronted from the yard, and down the valley, he could easily make the descent without fear of being seen.

But he determined to wait until night, and going to the barn he set to work manufacturing the means by which he could reach the balcony under the window.

The means consisted of two ropes, some thirty feet in length, and upon them tied, a foot and a half apart, were stout sticks, to serve as rounds to his hemp ladder.

This he rolled up and put away until needed.

After supper the impatient Leone said:

"You have not yet gone on the expedition you promised me you would, David?"

"Not yet, Leone; but you shall soon know all," he answered, not desiring to tell her the night of his intended ghost-hunt, as he feared she might lie awake waiting for some development, and if any came, he wished to keep it from her if he deemed it best.

It came on dark and rainy after supper, and the family soon retired, and David sought his room also; but as soon as all was

quiet he arose and cautiously stole out of the house.

Going to the place where he had concealed his rope-ladder he got it, along with a dark-lantern and stout club, his only weapon, and sought the mill.

He knew the interior well, and, having entered through a door, of which he had the key, for it was used as a store-house for hay, he slowly ascended to the floor above.

At last he came to the window far up in the roof, and found it open, and the wind causing the rain to beat in.

With the aid of his dark lantern, having raised the slide, he made the upper ends of the rope ladder fast to the beams, and lowered the other ends gently upon the balcony.

Then he got out of the window, and slowly, step by step, descended to the balcony.

All was darkness in the room, and for some moments he stood in silence, waiting for a sound within, and wholly unmindful of the drenching rain.

At last he placed his hand upon the sash, and, to his surprise, he raised it readily.

Then he stepped into the room, drew the sash down behind him, and sprung the slide of his dark lantern.

At the same time a bright glare flashed through the room, and what he then saw caused David Dunn to stagger backward, utter a cry, and, throwing up the window, to spring out upon the balcony, and clamber hastily and nervously up the rope ladder into the mill.

Drawing up his rope ladder after him, with the same nervous, eager step, he descended to the lower floor, and soon stood out in the open air, his hat in hand, and allowing the cold rain to beat down upon his head.

For a long time he stood thus, and then concealing his ladder, he returned to the house and threw himself upon his bed.

But not to sleep, for the dawn crept into his room, and he arose without having closed his eyes, and went about his duties.

Leone's quick eyes detected at breakfast that something had gone wrong with her honest lover, and she soon sought an opportunity to question him.

"Well, Sir Ghost-hunter, you look as though you had seen a real live spook last night," she said.

With an effort to be perfectly calm he added:

"I lost a good night's rest, Leone, to discover a nest of rats of in the haunted chamber."

"And that was all?" she said, evidently disappointed.

"Yes," and he choked, for David Dunn was not an adept at deception and lying.

Leone said nothing more; but the more she

thought over it, the more convinced she became that David Dunn had discovered more than he cared to make known to her.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

SEVERAL weeks passed away, after the ghost-hunt of David Dunn, and all of Leone's questioning and tact had failed to trip him upon the first story he had told about a nest of rats being the weird occupants of the mysterious rooms.

"Those rats make sounds strangely human, and walk remarkably like the tread of a man or woman, David," said Leone.

"So they do, Leone; and I have heard my old grandmother tell how rats in a loft would—"

"For shame, David, for you told me you never knew your grandmothers, as they died before you could remember."

"Did I tell you so, Leone?" and David blushed.

"Yes, you did."

"Well, then, it was somebody's grandmother I heard say rats in a loft sounded like a man's heavy step."

"But this sounds like a woman's step, for the tread is light."

"It must be one of the young rats you heard, Leone; or perhaps it was a mouse," and David really succeeded in looking innocent.

"David Dunn, you are a fraud, as I will some day find out," and with a half spoilt shake of her head, Leone departed, while David sprung into the light wagon and drove off to town on an errand for Mrs. Lucas.

There was a certain class of young men in the town who did not like David Dunn, and said he was wont to hold himself above them.

The truth was however, that they had failed to get in at the Mill Farm, and thereby have a chance to win the bright smiles of pretty Leone Lucas, and, it having been rumored around that David was the accepted lover of the maiden, whom it was now believed would be rich, they hated the young farmer for his good luck.

Unfortunately the day when David went to town, on an errand for Mrs. Lucas, he had business to call him to the tavern, and he there saw half a dozen of the young men in question; and wished to avoid them, for he observed at a glance that they had been imbibing freely.

"Hello, Dunn, come and join us if you are not too proud," cried one.

"I am not too proud, Williams, but I seldom drink, thank you, and you must excuse me," said David, quietly.

"No, we will not excuse you, for we intend to drink to the beauty of your intended bride, Leone Lucas, the daughter of a man who should have been hanged."

As the last word left the lips of Fred Williams he measured his full length upon the floor, for David was a hard hitter, and his fist had gone squarely into the face of the man who had uttered the words.

"Ah! that's your game, is it?" cried a brother of the man who had just been floored, and he rushed upon David, to also go backward with a force that sent him reeling into a corner.

"Come, boys, this gamecock's spurs must be clipped."

"Upon him, all!" cried another of the band, and they rushed *en masse* upon the brave young farmer, who stood his ground, though it was evident he would be fearfully worsted, if not killed.

David saw a score of men present, but not one whom he felt would befriend him, and yet he was no man to retreat, even against such odds.

He had been insulted before by the same men, and allowed it to pass; but now when Leone was thus lightly spoken of in a public bar-room, and her father so branded, he had promptly punished the insulter.

Now, as the two brothers had regained their feet, and with bleeding faces were leading the others on, it certainly looked dismal for poor David.

"One minute, gentlemen, and count me the friend of this brave fellow."

The words were lightly spoken, but in a voice that had a ring in it that showed they were not idle, and David saw a tall form, with broad shoulders, and a face almost effeminate in its beauty spring to his side.

He was dressed in a *neglige* traveling suit, wore a diamond stud in his immaculate shirt-front, a watch-chain of exquisite workmanship crossed his vest, and a large seal-ring was upon the little finger of his left hand.

In appearance he seemed almost a dandy, and in face, almost effeminate, for his mustache was long and silken, and his hair dropped in many waves upon his broad shoulders.

"I thank you, sir, but do not involve yourself in trouble on my account," said David, as his assailants momentarily paused at the sight of a champion appearing for their foe.

"My dear fellow, I am no man to stand by and see a gang of rowdies rush upon a brave man. If they retire while they can, well and good, and I'll treat all round; but if they crowd you, why then they must take the consequences."

There was something about the stranger

that showed he was not a braggart; but, wild with drink, and anxious for a fracas, the roughs determined to give both David and his ally a thrashing to remember.

"Come, boys, now at him, and pitch that popinjay out of the window if he interferes!" cried Fred Williams.

But, to the surprise of all, the "popinjay," as he had been called, did not wait for the attack, but forced the fighting, by suddenly springing forward, and with a skill that was wonderful sent five men down, just as David had his man, who was Fred Williams.

In less time than a minute the stranger had dragged and hustled the whole party out of the door, ere the astonished David and other lookers-on could believe their eyes.

"Come, gentlemen, it is my treat, so join me please," said the stranger quietly, addressing all in the the bar-room, and slipping his hand through David's arm he led him up to the counter.

The drinks were taken, amid a general lively talk regarding the marvelous powers of the stranger, and then the latter, declining all thanks from David, said:

"Now let me go and pay my fines, for those fellows will doubtless have me arrested for assault and battery."

"Not they, sir, but they will neither forgive or forget this, and if you remain here long I advise you to be on your guard."

"Oh, I always am, and I do expect to remain in the neighborhood some time, and was just going to get a vehicle to drive me out to Mr. Donald Lucas's farm, where I have engaged board for a few weeks."

David changed color, but asked quietly, as he gazed upon the handsome man before him:

"Are you not Mr. Roy Arundel?"

"I am, sir; have we met before, and I so rude as not to recall your face?"

"No, sir, we have never before met; but I am Mr. Lucas's farmer, and he was expecting you soon. My name is David Dunn."

"Mr. Dunn I am glad to know you, and feel that we shall be the best of friends."

"You then will be my pilot to the farm?"

"I have a light wagon with me, sir, and there is plenty of room for you in it, and your luggage too."

Roy Arundel seemed delighted, and half an hour after, seated by David's side, he was driving toward the Mill Farm, chatting away in a free-and-easy manner with the silent, thoughtful man at his side, for suddenly upon the heart of the young farmer had fallen a black shadow.

CHAPTER XV.

ROY ARUNDEL'S DOUBLE SURPRISE.

WHEN David Dunn drove up to the door of the farm-house, and deposited the young artist and his traps, he was compelled to admit to himself that he had never met a more delightful companion in his life.

The artist had served him a good turn at the tavern, and perhaps saved his life; but he had looked upon his ready aid rendered as a matter of course, and made light of it.

He had gone into raptures over the lovely views they had passed, on their way out to the farm, had praised the team as fine step-pers, complimented David on the way he handled the reins, and told several good stories, that made the young farmer laugh in spite of himself.

Leone was seated on the piazza of the farm-house as the wagon drove up, and instantly glanced up to meet the handsome eyes of the young artist fixed upon her.

Since coming in view of the place Roy Arundel had recognized it as the Haunted Mill which he had painted several years before, and which had brought him a cool five thousand from a millionaire.

"Well, I know that place well, or rather did some time ago, when no one dwelt there, and in fact no one cared to come near it. You said your name was Dunn, I believe?" and the artist turned to David, wondering if he was the hero of the story he had heard.

"Yes; David Dunn."

"And the name of the farmer is—"

"Donald Lucas."

"Ah, yes, I recall the name; but neither you nor Mr. Lucas are the ones who left the place to ruin years ago?"

"Mr. Lucas left the place many years ago, and has only of late returned to it."

"Yes, that was the name of the gentleman with whom I corresponded. Well, I little dreamed I was coming here to the very place I once painted, and where I passed a night, and was haunted by a ghost I was unable to catch. No ghosts here now, Mr. Dunn, I suppose?"

"There are idle rumors about the old house, sir, but I do not believe in ghosts," answered David, calmly.

"Nor do I—oh! there is loveliness!" and his eyes fell upon Leone as she sat reading upon the piazza.

Ere more could be said the wagon halted before the door, and David introduced Roy Arundel as he sprung out.

The artist uncovered his head and bowed low with courtly grace while Leone said, in her soft, pleasant way:

"I shall have to bid you welcome, Mr. Arundel, as my parents are both away. Be

seated, please, or will you go to your room, for it is ready for you?"

"It is pleasant to know one is expected, Miss Lucas, and it makes me feel at once at home, so I will say frankly I prefer to seek my room and get off some of the dust of travel."

She showed him his quarters while David drove the team to the stable, and in a short time the guest rejoined her upon the piazza.

He sat down near her on the settee, and, while he talked of things in general, drank in the exquisite beauty of her face and the grace of her form, while he mentally said:

"A sweeter creature I never saw, and I must say she is more beautiful than Maud."

"Who would have thought to find such an exquisite wild-flower here?"

"Well, I'm in luck, and this surprise is even more delightful than the thought that I am to be the guest of this old Haunted Mill, which served me so well. But I must be cautious, for, from all I can learn, her father is the hero of that murder story of the long ago."

Returning from a drive, Donald Lucas and his wife were presented by Leone to their guest, and greeted him kindly; but as Mrs. Lucas entered the house to look after supper, involuntarily from her lips came two words:

"Poor David!"

CHAPTER XVI.

MOTHERLESS.

THE scene of my story again shifts from the green fields, pleasant valleys and bold hills of the country to the crowded marts of the American metropolis.

In a grand brown-stone mansion in an upper fashionable street, a woman lay dying.

Around her was every evidence of luxury that wealth could buy, for rich curtains of silk shaded the windows, a velvet carpet gave back no sound to the tread, and the furniture was carved and massive.

The one who lay upon the bed, counting the life-breaths that seemed each moment growing fainter and fainter, had passed the meridian of life, for her hair was turning gray. Her eyes were yet bright, though upon every other feature had disease set its seal indelibly.

By the side of the bed, her head resting upon the hand of the invalid, which she grasped in both her own, and upon her knees, was a fair young form, as perfect as an artist's model. Her hair was golden, and had fallen loose from its comb, and the end lay upon the floor.

Presently she raised her head, and the face, though deathly pale, was one of exquisite beauty.

"Mother, are you sure there is no hope?" groaned the maiden, in a trembling voice.

"If I deemed there was one atom of hope, Maud, I would not tell you what now I wish to make known to you," answered the dying woman, in a voice stronger than one would suspect her capable of.

"It is something you think I should know?"

"Yes, Maud."

"It has been kept secret from me, you said?"

"Yes; and were your father alive now, it would not be told to you."

"Poor papa, that he should have ever gone on that ill-fated steamer, and thus lose his life!"

"It was long months, mother, before I gave up hope of his return, and prayed to have him return, hoping that in some miraculous way he had escaped death with the others," and the lovely eyes filled with tears.

"Alas! he did go down that night of storm, Maud, and thus the end has come as it has, and I must tell you that he died without leaving you one dollar."

"Oh, mother! what do I care for money?" cried the maiden.

"But, Maud, neither can I leave you a fortune, as you have a right to expect, rich as I seem."

"Mother, I am not mercenary; I believed father a rich man, and never expected to be poor; but I am young, have my health, have a fine education, and can readily make a living, so what do I care for riches?"

"But, Maud, my duty to you, to myself, and to the dead, compels me to tell you why you do not inherit this home, and all that we have."

"It will but worry you, mother, and I do not care."

"No; I must tell you."

"Your father inherited his wealth from his father, who, at the time of his death was angry with his younger son, a boy then at school, and cut him off with a small sum; but should your father die, all went to this youth; and should I die, my share also was to go to him."

"Your uncle, you know, has hated your father, and is one to claim every dollar of his own."

"Let him have it then, for I would not touch it," said Maud, indignantly.

"But, my child, I must tell you a secret, one which your uncle knows also, and knowing, has an offer to make to you."

"Maud, eighteen years ago your father met, one night, a policeman carrying a young and beautiful woman to prison, and in his arms the officer carried a young infant some six months old."

"The mother was refined-looking, but had been crushed by misfortune, and, deserted by her husband, so it seemed, was unable to earn a support for her child and herself, or secure work, when hampered by her baby, so she sought to leave the little thing at the door-step of a wealthy man, whose noble nature, she hoped, would not allow him to cast off the tiny one."

"But, found by the policeman in the act, she would have been borne to prison had not your father met them."

"After some talk with the woman, he glanced at the baby, as it lay in the officer's arms, and it smiled upon him, and he determined to take it as his own. He asked the young mother if she was married, and in response she held up a chain around the infant's neck, and to it was attached a gold wedding-ring, within which was engraven a date and two names."

"That little baby, Maud, that night parted from its mother, and we reared her as our own child."

"And I am that child?" said Maud, in a voice that had lost its sweetness and grown hard and stern.

"Yes, Maud, you are not our own flesh and blood."

"Oh, God! I am motherless and alone in the world," and with this cry the young girl sunk down once more by the bedside and buried her face in her hands, while her whole form shivered and quivered with emotion.

CHAPTER XVII.

NOT FOR SALE.

MRS. LUCIEN LATROBE died and was placed in the marble tomb, where slept those of her name before her, and poor Maud, the motherless girl, was indeed left alone in the world.

She knew no mother than Mrs. Latrobe, and always believing that she stood in that relationship to her, she had ever loved her as though in reality the same blood had flowed in their veins.

With bitterest grief she followed her to the grave, and then returned to the elegant home, which she had been reared to believe her own, to pack up and leave it forever.

She had received a note from Leo Latrobe, the heir, telling her to remain there as long as she pleased; but she knew him only as a fast man about town, whom she had been taught to fear, rather than love, and she determined to at once take her departure.

As all was his, she would be scrupulously just, and leave behind her all excepting such as she had a direct claim upon.

She had a few hundreds in gold, saved up from her pocket money from time to time,

some very handsome jewelry, and a fine wardrobe, and she muttered, as she was packing her trunks:

"Ah! I certainly will get some pupils soon, and if I should not, what I have will support me for a year, or more."

"A card for you, miss," said her maid entering, and still polite to the young girl, as she did not yet know how matters stood.

"Leo Latrobe," muttered Maud, and she added: "Tell him I will come down at once."

She swept into the parlor in her morning-dress, pale, but looking grandly beautiful, and there advanced to meet her a man of tall form and *distingue* air, though there was that in his face that proved he had lived to the full bent of his humor the thirty-five years of his life.

"Maud," and he spoke in a low soft tone, "I have come to ask you to remain here and be the fair lady of my home, for I would not, for worlds, see you go out alone in the world."

"I am certainly surprised, when I know that Mr. Latrobe is aware that I am not his niece, and has known it for years, though a secret to the world, that she should insult me by making such an offer," said Maud haughtily.

"But, you misunderstand me, Maud, for, having learned to love you, since first I knew you, I now ask you to remain as my wife."

"Never, sir!"

The words fairly rung as they came from her lips.

"Ha! you speak as though you hated, rather than loved me?" he said angrily.

"Mr. Latrobe, I know well how you have felt toward your brother, whom I loved as a father, and I know well all of your past life, or enough of it to make me abhor and fear you; so understand that I take your offer as an insult, rather than an honorable seeking for a wife."

"You shall repent this, my penniless beauty."

"I will never repent it as I would being bound to you, sir."

"You speak well, for a girl who is motherless, ay, and fatherless too, for you do not know who your parents were, and—"

"Silence! you villain!"

He fairly shrunk from before her blazing eyes, and then she continued hastily:

"Within the hour, sir, for I cannot go sooner, I leave your house; but for that time I demand that you leave me alone."

She turned and swept haughtily from the room, unheeding his call for her to remain, and as she passed on up-stairs he muttered:

"Curse you, girl, you will be glad enough

to come to me for aid before I am done with you, for I shall thwart you at every effort you make to earn an honest living. I loved you once, but I am beginning to hate you now—ay, as bitterly as I did Lucien Latrobe, brother though he was of mine. You leave within an hour do you? So be it, and I will know whither you go."

Seizing his hat he hastily left the mansion, and when Maud departed an hour after, she little dreamed that she had a detective upon her track.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FAITHLESS.

IN a cosy room of an up-town boarding-house, sat Maud the Motherless, as she pathetically was wont to call herself when thinking aloud.

"It is the only name I have a right to, for I was baptized Maud, and certainly have no claim upon the name of my poor, dead, adopted parents."

Her face wore a worried look, as well as being pale and stamped with sadness, for she had during the past two months, vainly tried to obtain music pupils, or any one to take lessons in drawing or French, which she was also most capable of teaching.

Several times she had had it plainly hinted to her that she was a nameless girl, her history having become known, and even darker insinuations had been thrown out by those whom she had once believed her friends.

Her money would not last many months longer, she well knew, and then she must begin to sell her jewels, her dresses, and all must go.

"Oh! if I could only hear from the one being I have to love now, I would be content," she murmured, as she sat alone in her room, that dark, dreary day, with the rain beating against the panes, and finding a dismal echo in her heart.

"It would not be right," she continued, "to hold him to his pledge, now that I am penniless and, worse still, motherless, for I do not even know who I am; but he said he loved me, and I believe him, and feel that he will not cast me off when he has heard all. But why has he not written, I wonder? I wrote him, to the address he gave, telling him all that had happened, and begging him to instantly reply, for I released him from his engagement, under the circumstances of my being a pauper instead of an heiress. And yet no letter comes."

Just then a rap came at the door, and a servant entered.

"Miss Latrobe, the postman said that this letter was left for you at your old home, but was given back this morning, after having been left there for weeks.

"And here is another, miss."

Maud eagerly seized the letter, and saw that it was the one which she had been expecting, while the other was cast indifferently aside.

Hastily she tore the envelope, and her hands trembled, and her eyes became blurred as she recognized the well-known writing.

And what she read there brought a moan from her heart, and still clasping the letter she repeated what was written within:

"My income is not large enough to support you as you have been accustomed to live, Maud, and therefore I accept my release at your hands, knowing that I am doing but justice to you in not binding you through life to a poor man. Accept my deepest sympathy in all your sorrow and misfortunes, and believe me ever your friend."

These words she repeated aloud over and over again until each one seemed to burn itself indelibly into her heart and brain.

"Deserted by him, too! Ah, me, this is the bitterest blow of all, to know that he whom I loved so fondly is faithless. It was the gold, he thought would be mine, that he sought, and not me for what I am. It almost makes me revengeful toward him, to think he so duped my young and trusting heart as to believe him to be all that was pure and noble.

"Oh! how bitter is the lesson I am learning, of what coldness and unkindness, what falsehood and faithlessness, there is in this world."

For a long time she sat in saddest meditation, weeping bitterly one moment, and drying her eyes almost savagely the next, until suddenly her gaze fell upon the second letter given her by the servant, and which had been forgotten.

Mechanically she took it up, and breaking the envelope, read:

"Seeing in the *Herald* your advertisement, and the duty devolving upon me to obtain a young lady-teacher for our country school, I trouble you with a line, hoping you may be prevailed upon to come here and take charge, although I fear you will find few scholars who care to learn French, German and music, which you advertise yourself as competent to teach.

"It is but a small country school of thirty scholars, located in a delightful neighborhood, and the salary is five hundred a year, with board at my house, for I am trustee.

"If you care to accept such a situation, please let me know, and if you do not, perhaps you can suggest the name of some good young lady I can write to upon the subject.

"An early reply will greatly oblige,

"Yours, with respect,

"NATHAN DEEMS."

"I will take the place, for it will be a change for me, and carry me away from these hated people and this city, which now I hate. Yes, I will write to Mr. Deems at once."

CHAPTER XIX.

AN UNFORGOTTEN FACE.

"Oh! how could I have been so blind? Love David Dunn? The idea is preposterous, now that I know really what it is to love!"

The speaker was Leone Lucas, and it was just eight weeks after the coming of Roy Arundel to the Mill Farm as a boarder.

From the first, Leone had felt that she had met the one man on earth to her, and that her love for poor David Dunn had been but an idle dream.

He had saved her life; he was true as steel, noble-hearted, and she had really believed that she had loved him, until it dawned upon her that she was vastly mistaken.

She pitied David, and tried to be ever so kind to him, for she saw that he could read all that was in her heart, and his honest face was growing daily more haggard.

He had said to her one day:

"Leone, you do not love me."

"Don't be foolish, David, for you know that I do," she answered, impatiently.

"Yes, as you would love a dog or a horse, but not as you once loved me. I tell you, Leone, you are not the same girl since that artist has been here. Now, don't think I am going to condemn you, or hate him for stealing you from me, for I love you too much to censure you, and he did me a good turn I shall never forget. But, Leone, I cannot think he is the man to make you happy, and each day I see you slipping more and more away from me, and it nearly breaks my heart."

Poor Leone wept, and said she did not love Roy Arundel, though she knew she was hiding the truth; but he had not asked her, in so many words, to be his wife, and until he did, she would not admit that her engagement with David was broken. She pitied the young farmer, for well she knew what he suffered, from feeling all that she would suffer, should Roy Arundel leave her.

Mrs. Lucas and David had many a chat together, and yet they could not decide upon any course to save Leone from the artist.

"Something tells me he is not just what he should be," said David, dolefully.

"And I have the same feeling about him," answered Mrs. Lucas.

"He is ever most kind to me, and his manners are most elegant; but, somehow, he does not show out, I fear, just what he is. I have spoken to Donald about him, but he has been fascinated by the artist, and seems to love him already as though he were a son, and, I believe, would willingly see Leone become his wife."

All this, from the lips of Mrs. Lucas, was poor consolation for poor David, who went

about his duties in the same untiring manner, but hugging to his heart a grief of which he had had a presentiment, when he heard that the artist was coming to the Mill Farm.

Soon after this conversation between Mrs. Lucas and David, Leone, as was her wont, accompanied Roy Arundel in one of his morning sketching tramps, and upon reaching a lovely scene, the two sat down together, the maiden taking out some embroidery and beginning work upon it, while the artist began upon the sketch.

Thus half an hour passed, with an occasional word between them, and both seemingly happy in each other's presence, and devoted to their respective work.

Suddenly the artist dropped his pencil, and said, in his low, soft way:

"Leone, I wish I could sketch that little heart of yours, as readily as I can yonder hill and river."

It was the first time he had ever called her Leone, and she started and blushed; but she answered quietly, yet with downcast eyes:

"Why would you wish to sketch my heart?"

"That I might know what is within it, Leone."

"Well, the cells are of different size, for there is a large one of vanity, another of curiosity, a third of ignorance, and then some wee ones with my virtues. So now, sir, you have my heart sketched for you."

"Is there no love in it?"

"Love? Oh, yes!"

"You mean that you love your parents?"

"Of course."

"And that big-hearted, honest-faced David?"

"Indeed I do!"

"I know that he loves you."

"I am very glad, and your sense of penetration is very keen," and not yet had she raised her eyes from her work, which she kept at steadily, though she was making false stitches.

"Oh! a blind man can see that he loves you, and I fear that you love him."

"Why fear it?"

"Because I wish you to love me."

"Ah!"

"Yes, Leone; will you not give me just one little atom of your love?"

"How can I love any one unless I know they love me?" she asked, archly.

"Then I will confess that I do love you with all my heart and soul, Leone, and beg you to return that love and I will be your slave."

"You will never be any woman's slave, Mr. Arundel, and besides, I would not wish you mine; but as you have told me that you

loved me, I will frankly make two confessions to you."

"I will listen to all that falls from your sweet lips, Leone," he said, drawing nearer and endeavoring to take her hand.

But she drew it away, and said:

"First I will tell you that I *do* love you."

"Thank you for those words, my darling."

"Second, I will tell you that it was knowing you that taught me how blind I was, for, Roy Arundel, I am engaged to David Dunn."

"Good Heavens!"

"Well may you exclaim; but it is true."

"He is your father's farmer!"

"Yes; and a truer, nobler *man* never lived."

"But he is untutored and—"

"In the ways of *your* world, yes; but he is by no means a fool, for David has a fine mind, he has studied hard since I have known him, and he comes of good family."

"With all these virtues I do not wonder that he fascinated you."

"Don't sneer, sir, for you must know that I owe my life to David Dunn."

"Forgive me, Leone, but the thought that he, and not I, was to be the one to wear you as a jewel his in heart made me bitter for a moment."

"No; I will not longer remain engaged to David, for I shall tell him frankly I never knew my heart until I met you."

"Then you will be mine?" joyously cried the young artist.

"Yes, one of these days; but, poor David!"

Something very like an anathema upon David arose to the lips of Roy Arundel, but was fortunately, for him, not given utterance to, and soon after the lovers started upon their return to the farm-house.

As they turned into the highway from the path they had been following, a vehicle passed with two persons in it.

One was evidently a farmer, and his companion was a young and beautiful girl, dressed in deep mourning.

"Good God!"

The cry came from the lips of Roy Arundel, and he stood, white and motionless, gazing at the retreating vehicle, the occupants of which seemed not to have seen the artist and Leone.

"What! are you ill? Oh speak! for I can go for aid," cried Leone in alarm.

"Oh no, for it is nothing; only that man's face reminded me so of one I once knew, and who is now dead. How silly I was to be so excited; but it was a great shock to me," and with an effort the artist became his free-and-easy self once more.

CHAPTER XX.

BROKEN HEART-STRINGS.

"DAVID, I have something to say to you," said Leone, the evening following the avowal of love from the lips of Roy Arundel.

The artist had driven into town with Donald Lucas, and Leone had been seated upon the piazza awaiting their return, and communing with her own thoughts, which seemed alternately bitter and sweet, when David Dunn passed around the house.

"Well, Leone, I will listen, for I am ready to know all," he said sadly.

She seemed embarrassed, and for a moment was silent; then she said:

"Sit down here, David."

"No, let me stand here, for I feel as though I would suffocate sitting down," and he folded his arms upon his broad breast, and stood in no ungraceful attitude leaning against a post of the piazza.

"David, do you love me very much?" suddenly broke from her lips.

"Oh Leone! do not ask me," he almost groaned; then continued:

"Do I love you *very* much? Ay, so much, that each day that I have seen you slipping away from me, it has broken a heart-string, for you were bound to me, Leone, by tendrils of my love which clung about you as the ivy does, not to be easily torn away. I am the worthless tree, around which your love, the ivy, entwined, until all my defects were hidden from my own view and I foolishly imagined that I was the one who had won your dear little heart.

"Fool that I was! I have been punished by the grief upon me, now that I know I have lost for ever my little sweetheart. Bah! I am a fool to make you weep, to cause you pain, so tell me quickly, Leone, all that you would say, and let me leave you."

He had at times spoken with a vehemence and eloquence of manner that had shown her how deeply he loved her, and it had sunk deep into her heart.

But, though she pitied David Dunn in her inmost being, she loved Roy Arundel with all the strength of her nature, and she must cause pain to the one or the other, and the farmer must be the one to suffer.

"David," she said almost sternly, dashing the tears from her eyes; "David, I meant not to deceive you, but in doing so I deceived myself, for I believed that I loved you, and had it not been for the coming of Roy Arundel, we would have gone through life contentedly together.

"But I know now that what I felt for you was a sisterly affection only, and I beg you to release me from my engagement with you."

"Oh, Leone, my poor, dear little sweetheart, you know that I gladly give you up, to add one jot or tittle to your joy. Release you! Ah, yes, for not once would I claim you, sweetheart, when I knew that your heart was another's. If it will be your joy, Leone, I will give you to Mr. Arundel without a murmur, and, should life not go well with you, should clouds come when you expect only sunshine, and you need a true friend, then do not forget, sweetheart, your old lover, poor David Dunn, who will lay down his life to save your little heart one throb of anguish. Kiss me this once, Leone, for it is good-by."

He suddenly drew her to him, kissed her almost savagely, and turning, strode away, the last heart-string broken that bound her to him.

CHAPTER XXI.

A THREAT THAT WAS NOT KEPT.

AFTER this, David Dunn seemed just the same, excepting that his smile had lost its brightness; but he was always as pleasant as before, to both the maiden and the young artist, and seemed anxious to show them that he held no grudge in his big heart for their happiness, where he had only pain.

One day David had been to the mill on horseback, to settle some accounts, and coming back he had dismounted to tighten his saddle-girth, when his horse, a young colt, had suddenly bounded away from him and started homeward at a run. Knowing the utter impossibility of catching him, David started homeward on foot, and to shorten the distance of seven miles cut through a forest.

He had gotten through the woodland, when he came upon a house, where he knew the village school was kept, until a new building could be erected, for the last had been burnt down.

The place had at one time been a small farm-house, and stood half a mile from the little village, and back in a small grove.

The path which David followed led him right by the house, and he was walking along at his brisk, swinging gait, when he suddenly stopped, and stood in the attitude of listening.

Voices had reached his ears and the sound came from within the school-house! He knew that school was over for the day, and yet the voices within seemed to rivet him to the spot, and then cause him to draw cautiously near the open window and crouch down beneath it.

From the position thus gained he could hear distinctly all that passed within the room. That there were two persons within.

was evident, and a man's and a woman's voices were heard, and the former was saying, in a hoarse tone:

"I came here to tell you that the man was your foe, and paid me well to dog you everywhere you went; but you gave me the slip, and it took me a long time to hunt out where you were hiding.

"But I've found you, girl, and I tell you I'm tired of dogging your steps, if I do get paid for it, and if you say the word, and say you'll divide square with me, it's a go, and I'll end his days."

"Begone from my presence, you base wretch!" cried a voice that was sweet-toned, though raised in anger.

"Well, I'll not begone unless you buy me off. Come, you've got plenty of money hidden away somewhere, and unless you swear you'll bring me one thousand dollars here tomorrow, I'll just let out to the people all about you, and you'll lose your place."

"I tell you leave me!"

"Not without the money, or your promise."

"Oh, that there was some one near to call upon for aid!" cried the young girl, for such she was.

"But there is no one, and I've got it all my own way, I tell you," was the malignant reply.

"*You are mistaken, sir!*"

The speaker was David Dunn, and, with the leap of an athlete he was in the window in an instant, and advancing upon the man.

One quick glance showed him a young and lovely girl, whom he had several times before met on horseback, dashing along the highway, and a large heavily bearded man.

The maiden was crouching down upon one of the school benches, and the man had evidently been standing so as to render her flight impossible.

At David's reply, the villain turned quickly, drew a pistol and fired.

At the shot David Dunn slightly recoiled, but again springing forward grappled with the man, who had hastily drawn a long knife from beneath his coat.

The weapon David managed to wrench from him, when his adversary, who seemed a perfect walking arsenal, drew another pistol, and to save his own life the young farmer gave the fatal thrust.

Instantly his foe fell back, staggered, and fell dead.

It was a moment of terror to the young girl, for she saw that David was wounded, and she cried:

"Oh, sir, you are hurt! Here, lie down here, while I hasten for aid."

She led David, who was growing weak, to a bench, and then darted away like the wind,

to return within five minutes with a physician, whom she had fortunately met near by in his gig, and a farmer, whom she had called from his field.

In the mean time David Dunn had fainted from loss of blood; but the doctor, after examining the wound, pronounced it not necessarily fatal, and others arriving, the young farmer was carried to the comfortable home of Nathan Deems, who warmly welcomed him into his household, and Maud, the Motherless, as she had called herself when in New York, was installed as chief nurse.

CHAPTER XXII.

PLAYING A DOUBLE GAME.

"MR. ARUNDEL, I wish you would do me a favor," called out Judge Martin Dale to the young artist, who was riding by his house one day some weeks after the desperate encounter of David Dunn and the villain who had threatened Maud.

"All right, judge," said Roy Arundel, for he had met the lawyer quite often at the Mill Farm.

"Dismount and come into my office then, and I'll send you on a mission to a lovely client."

"Who is she, judge?"

"Not Leone Lucas, sir, by any means, and that reminds me that you seem to like our Mohawk Valley," and the judge winked.

"I do, sir. I had an affection for it long before I saw it, and since I first heard that lovely old ballad which goes—

"Oh, sweet is the vale where the Mohawk gently glides,

On its clear, winding way to the sea."

"Yes, and you might add, I think, with the ballad:

"But dearer far, oh yes, dearer far to me,
Is my blue-eyed, bonnie—"

"I'll own to the soft impeachment, judge; but what is that favor I can do you?"

"It is this: I am called down to the city at once; but I have some letters here that have just arrived, telling me to seek out a young lady and tell her that an enemy, repenting of his sins, has died and left her a fortune.

"It seems she was a waif, a nobody-knows-whose child, who was adopted into a wealthy family; but because she would not marry the brother of her supposed father, she was cast off penniless. The one who leaves her the fortune admits to having tormented her shamefully, and now, to atone for it, leaves her all his riches, which are enormous, I believe, from all accounts.

"Now, you seek the girl, tell her of her good fortune, give her these letters, and say that I will return in a week's time and tell her all I know about it as soon as I have seen

the New York lawyers who wrote me to look her up."

"But who is this heiress, judge?"

"Her name is Maud Latrobe, and—"

"Ah!"

"Do you know her?"

"Oh, yes, I knew her well in the city. She is an heiress then?"

"Yes, but is teaching school in the little village some eight miles beyond the Mill Farm. By the way, she is the heroine of that affair in which that noble fellow Dunn so nearly lost his life. But you will do this for me, Arundel, will you not?"

"With pleasure, judge."

Five minutes after the artist was on his way to the little village to see Maud, the Motherless.

He reached the school-house just as the fair teacher had dismissed her scholars, and dismounting from his horse, stepped inside the door.

"Maud!"

She started back and became very pale; but recovering herself quickly, said calmly:

"Mr. Arundel, this is indeed a surprise."

"And not a pleasure, Maud?" he asked softly.

"Why should it be, sir?"

"Are we no longer friends?"

"Yes, I suppose we may say friends," she answered coldly.

"Maud, do not act thus toward me, for I have long sought to find you, and only of late have done so, since your being the heroine of that affair here in the school-house.

"I have now come, Maud, to beg you to let me take back those words, all owing you to sever our engagement, and once more claim you as my promised wife. I believed, then, I acted for your good; but now I feel that I cannot live without you, and having been very successful of late, in getting off some of my paintings, I am fully able to relieve you of these hard duties of teaching, and give you a life of ease and comfort. Maud, you will not cast me off, when I plead to you?" and he held forth his hands, while his glowing eyes seemed to fascinate her as of yore.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHAT LEONE SAW AND HEARD.

A CHANGE had come over the inmates of Mill Farm, for the young artist had taken his leave, though he had not left the neighborhood. Better views of scenery, he had told Leone, were to be had further up the valley, and he had gone to dwell a while at a tavern in a small village nine miles distant.

He had promised to ride over every day or two, but had not kept his word in a single instance, though he had been gone for long

weeks, bitter, long, cruel weeks to poor Leone, who began to feel that she had loved unworthily and in vain.

Day by day the roses had faded from her cheeks, and her parents—and David Dunn, who had recovered from his wound, and was again at the farm—began to feel most anxious about her.

"If she dies of a broken heart, I'll be revengeful enough to kill Roy Arundel," muttered David savagely, as he saw how pale and wan Leone looked.

One night Leone paced her room, for she was unable to sleep, and although all the house was quiet, for it was after midnight, she descended to the floor below. Suddenly she started, for distinctly above her head she heard a footstep.

It came from the haunted rooms!

For a moment she stood in silent thought, and then she seemed to have made up her mind to some course, for cautiously she went into the sitting-room and approached her father's desk. She knew that it had a secret spring, but she had seen him open it, and after a few trials it yielded, and she thrust her hand into the drawer, and it came back grasping a bunch of keys.

Stealthily now she crept back up-stairs, to her room, and taking a candle and matches, went toward the deserted wing. She soon halted at the end of the long, narrow hallway, and after a short time had unlocked the padlock, and then the other lock that fastened the door. Opening it, she stepped within.

All was darkness; but closing the door behind her, she ignited a match, lighted her candle, and timidly glanced around her. As she did so she started back, and only by the greatest effort, did she suppress the cry that arose to her lips.

There, standing upright and facing her, she beheld a tall, slender form, clothed in white.

It was a woman, and she had risen from a low bed at the entrance of Leone, and stood gazing upon her with wide-open, staring eyes.

At first Leone was dumb with amazement and horror, and believed that she stood in the presence of a ghost; but one glance showed her that the woman *was ironed hands and feet!*

There were manacles around her hands and feet; but the chains which bound her to the floor, were wrapped with cloth, as though to prevent their clanking. The woman's face was white as marble, and yet showed traces of great beauty, as did also her form. She might have been thirty-five, or fifteen years older, for it was hard to tell.

The room was furnished comfortably, and a plate of food rested on a table near.

"Who are you?" gasped Leone.

"I first would know who you are, girl?" asked the woman, in a low, rich voice.

"I am Leone Lucas."

"Leone Lucas! You are then the daughter of Donald Lucas by his second wife?" said the woman.

"You are mistaken, in believing that my father has been twice married.

"My mother saved his life twenty years ago, nearly, when he was very ill, and he married her."

"Poor girl, it is a hard secret for your ears; but, as you have come here and discovered your father's secret, I will tell you that *I married your father* twenty-two years ago!"

Leone made no reply, but stood like one in a dream, while the woman went on:

"Yes, I was Mary Merwin, and I married your father secretly; but after he killed Leon Scott and was acquitted, he left without one word to me. Twenty years after he came back here, bringing a wife and daughter—yourself. True, it was believed that I had taken my own life, and I now wish that I had done so, for, oh! what brain-burning and heart-aching should I not have saved myself.

"Loving your father as I did, his desertion of me almost drove me mad, and I went far from him, and sought work in the city. There, my child, and his, was born; but I was compelled to give her up, and God only knows what has become of her, and whether she is dead or living now.

"Back here, dragged by my half-crazed brain, I came, and I lived here in his own room, and folks called the house haunted. One night your father came and found me here, and then the secret was out. He would have killed me then, girl, but I swore to keep his secret. He put me in irons, as you see, and each night he has brought me food. But oh! how cruel of him to treat me so, and keep me here to die, and thus prevent me from going away to search for my child!

"Once another came here, and I told him who and what I was, and he left, telling me he would not betray your father on account of the misery it would bring upon you and your mother. But you know all, and you will release me, will you not?"

Leone had not taken her eyes off the woman while she spoke; but now, at her question, with a great effort, she said:

"Yes, upon one condition."

"Name it, girl!"

"That you go far away from here, and never let my poor mother know of your existence, and who and what you are."

"I swear to do as you wish, girl."

"Then I will bring you some clothing more suitable, give you some money, so you will not want, and let you go free."

Half an hour after, the maniac, freed of her irons, was gliding away, in the darkness of night, from the place in which she had so long been a prisoner, while poor Leone, tenfold more wretched than ever, was pacing her room with untiring tread.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AFTER LONG YEARS.

"Miss, do you think I am mad?"

Maud Latrobe gave a slight cry and started to her feet.

She had only a short while before dismissed her school, and was making up her reports, while she waited for the coming of one who always came for her each evening.

That one was Roy Arundel, the artist, whom Maud had taken back again into her heart, and whom she had promised to marry as soon as her term closed, for all of his entreaties would not cause her to break her contract with Nathan Deems before it ended, for she promised him she would try it for three months, and the end of November, the probation, was at hand.

At the strange question, in a soft, pleading voice, she had sprung to her feet, to find standing before her a woman, with a pale, sad, anxious face, and a shawl drawn closely around her form.

"No; I do not think you are mad, my good woman. Sit down and talk to me," said Maud, in a kindly tone, though she did see in the flashing eyes and quivering lips that the woman was mad.

"They say I am mad, and they are on my track; but you are good and beautiful, and you will not let them harm me?"

"No; I will care for you."

"Oh, what I could tell if I only would! But I won't, for I promised *her* I would not, if she'd set me free. And if they catch me, I cannot find my child, my little Maud."

"Maud? Why, *my* name is Maud!"

"Your name is Maud?" and the woman sprung to her feet.

"Yes."

"But you are grown, and my Maud was a little baby, for that was twenty years ago."

"And I was a little baby twenty years ago," said Maud, trying to soothe her until Roy Arundel should come, for she feared the woman.

"Then if your name is Maud, and you were a little baby twenty years ago, I will tell you about my little Maud. You see she is motherless now, though she may have a kind adopted mother, and she may be dead, but I will find out.

"I was too poor to care for her, and her father had deserted me, and I sought to leave her with good people to bring up, when I was arrested, and my little Maud and myself were being taken to prison, when a gentleman came along and he took her, and paid the officer to let me go as soon as I showed him my wedding-ring, which I had hung by a gold chain around my baby's neck, to show she was not a child of shame—"

"Great God! Your name? Quick! tell me your name?" almost shrieked Maud.

"Why, I'll tell you," answered the woman, calmly, "if you won't let any one know. It was Mary Merwin."

"And your husband's name?" cried Maud, in the same earnest tones.

"Donald Lucas!" whispered the woman.

"Thank God I am no longer motherless, for I am your child, your Maud, *mother*," and the poor girl threw her arms around the woman's neck and drew the poor, tired head down upon her shoulder, while she continued talking rapidly.

"See! I have here around my neck that same chain, and the ring, in which is engraven:

"'Donald to Mary, May 1st, 18—;'

and I was taken as you have said, and—"

The woman held her off at arm's length and gazed into her face, and back to its seat in her aching head came reason, and from her lips broke the cry:

"Yes, *you are my child, my own Maud!*"

CHAPTER XXV.

OUT OF THE SNARE.

THERE was to be a quiet wedding at Farmer Nathan Deems's, and the bride was to be Maud Latrobe, as I will still call the once motherless maiden, whose career had been such a strange one.

And she was to wed Roy Arundel, the artist, who seemed most happy at the coming event, seemingly forgetful of the heart he had broken on the Mill Farm.

Besides the farmer, his good wife and the parson, there was present a pale, sad-faced woman dressed in black, in whom the reader will recognize, in spite of the change for the better, the unhappy and deserted wife of Donald Lucas.

Just as the young couple took their stand before the parson, other guests, and uninvited ones arrived, in the persons of David Dunn and Judge Martin Dale.

"Pardon me," said David, in his deep tones, stepping forward before the surprised party, "but Miss Latrobe, I wish to save you from a snare into which that villain has almost led you."

"Ha! this to me, sir?" cried Roy Arundel, springing forward.

But the muzzle of a revolver suddenly confronted him, while David Dunn continued in his calm way:

"Yes, this to you, sir, for I save this maiden from a man who has already broken the heart of a young and lovely girl, and who has kept,

Miss Latrobe, from you the secret that you have inherited a large fortune, as this gentleman, Judge Dale, can testify. This man, Roy Arundel, has played a deep game, but, thank God, I save you from him, and in thus thwarting him of his gold, I in a slight degree, avenge poor Leone Lucas who had trusted him. Roy Arundel, there is the door, sir, and I warn you not to let me find you in this valley when another sun shall rise."

The baffled man gritted his teeth, shook his fist menacingly at David Dunn, and beat a hasty retreat, just as poor Maud sunk, insensible, into the arms of her mother, for it was a bitter blow for her to find out for the second time she had trusted and been deceived.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONCLUSION.

SEVERAL years have passed since the rescue of Maud from the snare into which Roy Arundel was leading her, and it has brought changes upon the scenes and characters of my true story.

Were you to ride to-day through the neighborhood of the lovely Mohawk Vale, where happened the incidents related, you would find that the Haunted Mill was again deserted, for Donald Lucas had again become a wanderer upon the face of the earth, after the death of the woman who had believed herself to be his only wife, for the shock, upon learning the whole fearful truth, had killed her, and the remorse-stricken man had fled from the scene of his crimes.

A few miles up the valley is an elegant mansion, surrounded by hundreds of well-tilled acres, and therein dwell David Dunn and his beautiful wife, once known as Maud the Motherless.

And that poor mother, having obtained a divorce from her erring husband, lives not far away as Mrs. Judge Martin Dale, and let us hope her latter years will be happier than those of her past.

And Leone?

Poor girl! Let a marble tomb in the valley, on the green bank of the mill-stream, tell her sad fate, for it reads simply:

"POOR LEONE,

Died, May 1st, 18—,

The victim of a broken heart."

In the Metropolis, courted by many for his genius, dwells Roy Arundel, the artist, whose works have made him famous; but, that the "still small voice of conscience" hurts him may be surmised from the fact that one day, a year after the death of Leone, the monument was placed above her grave, and David Dunn traced it to the hand of the one who had broken her heart, and was not ashamed to take comfort in the fact that at last, in the sorrow and remorse of the artist, his victim was avenged.

THE END.

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